JEWELS IN BRASS

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/bwb_W9-DDO-256

JEWELS IN BRASS

BY

JITTIE HORLICK

AUTHOR OF "A STRING OF BEADS"

NEW YORK

BRENTANOS

1913

Printed in Great Britain by Messrs. Brendon & Son, Ltd., Plymouth.

JEWELS IN BRASS

CHAPTER I

TWENTY-FIVE years ago, on a certain dull, dark, typically November day in London, soon after the luncheon hour, a man of about forty years of age could have been seen slowly climbing up the stairs of a house in Cavendish Square, on his way to the quarter known as the "nursery." He was climbing slowly because he had a weak heart, and racing up the stairs was forbidden him; otherwise he was a perfectly ordinary, vigorous, normal-looking person, though of a rather intellectual, ascetic, studious type.

Looking at him one knew instinctively that he was a worker, even while his thin white hands proclaimed the fact that whatever his labours, they were not manual. He seemed to have a concentrated purpose about him—one would say at once that some absorbing study filled his life—while the whole look and colour and carriage of him conveyed the idea of hot rooms and microscopic examinations and scientific research, with a minimum of fresh air and exercise.

He hesitated a moment when he arrived at the landing he sought—three stories up from the street—and then he turned the handle and went in. A kind, cheer-

ful, robust, and most respectable-looking Nanny was bustling about, arranging small garments, poking the fire into a cheerful blaze, placing discarded toys carefully back on shelves, and generally inviting the spirits, Harmony, Cosiness, and Homeliness, to look upon the nursery as their own.

It is a soothing place, a nursery, when presided over by a good genius of a Nanny; it seems so real and restful to find a spot where everything is utilitarian without being sordid, and where each object has a very good reason for its presence, even the nigger and the owl which decorate the mantelpiece, turning out to be respectively a money-box and a night-light holder if properly investigated. And the brightness of it—surely even the sourest and most unimaginative of women would try to make a nursery bright!—the life, the movement, and in all well-regulated establishments, the nice "homey" smells, ranging from German rusks to violet powder, from burnt toffee to eucalyptus!

It was just such an atmosphere as this that Arthur Hext entered into when he turned the handle and went in.

The small occupant of the nursery sat on the floor, playing at what looked like something very delicate in the way of "feasts"; she glanced up when he entered, and smiled—a vague, sweet, indefinite smile, never attempting to get up and rush at him with the noisy familiarity of most children for their parents, but continuing to play placidly, apparently weaving her own fancies without allowing his entrance to cause any break in the thread.

She was a child with a great deal of imagination, and where other children mostly used the ready-made

toys that came nearest to their hands, she often discarded these, preferring to invent and adapt things for herself. Thus, at this feast, a china dinner service, loudly decorated, lying invitingly between a layer of shavings and a glass lid that hid none of its beauties, had been firmly rejected, and instead, acorn cups stood for fairy goblets, rose-leaves for plates, matches for knives and forks, and the fairy visitors partook of such dainty fare as scales of fishes, roast legs of beetles, fried lady-birds, berries dusted with sugar, and crystallized violets, washed down by melted snow and liquid honey.

But in spite of her imaginings Antonia was an entirely real child, and like everybody else, from an Archbishop to a Midinette, had her own particular inconsistencies, and so in the midst of this gossamer feast, proudly placed in the centre of the table, a gross *pièce de résistance*, there was a ham—and such a ham ! A large fat date had been specially selected, had been pinched by childish fingers till one end of it was thin and attenuated, and the other fat and bulgy. Round the thin end, which looked terribly uneatable, a bit of pink paper had been twisted, proclaiming itself stickily and triumphantly as—*the frill !* And this poetic fancy lay on a long and dirty London leaf that had been culled from the garden in the square—and to little Antonia it seemed just as fairy-like and remote as all the other dishes.

But it was no interesting speculation on the subject of leaves and hams and human inconsistencies that occupied Hext's mind as he sat on the fender and watched the child with a queer sort of eagerness—it was something else, far more curious and difficult to define.

"Where's Uncle D'on?" Antonia said, raising her eyes gravely.

"He isn't here this afternoon."

"Uncle D'on" (Antonia couldn't say her J's) was John Orlebar, her father's greatest friend—he came so often that there was nothing surprising in her asking the question. The two men were of a very different type, though strongly attached to each other. Orlebar was a rising barrister, already feared and respected in the profession, with strong leanings, in his leisure hours, towards golf and grouse and fresh air, while Hext was a genius in his own way, a scientist, a kind of Darwin, a psychologist—a creature who lived in a steam-heated atmosphere and wrote world-famous books on the conquest of matter by mind, on the riddle of sex scientifically worked out, on evolution, on the fourth dimension, and other subjects too deep for most of us—while his pet recreation ground was Monte Carlo, where he worked out wonderful systems with a red and blue pencil, losing all his money but never his patience or hopes of success.

To Orlebar his friend's attitude of mind towards his little daughter was a mystery yet to be unravelled, a phenomenon of absorbing interest. To an ordinary observer they might have seemed like any other father and daughter, but Orlebar happened to be very clear-eyed. Instead of belonging to the very large percentage of persons who see nothing that is not entirely obvious, he possessed a mind particularly sensitive to, and receptive of, impressions—much as certain photographic plates have surfaces so highly sensitized that they absorb a picture, every detail complete and clear, in the minutest fraction of a second, while others have not the same fine results after a quarter of an hour's exposure.

He watched Hext and his child together, and he came to the conclusion that though his friend was very good to the child, he had no love for it. There was something foreign, something alien between them. They stood there and looked at each other across a barrier, they sized each other up, refusing to take anything for granted. Moreover, he felt convinced that Hext's strongest feeling for her was curiosity—he even went farther and called it a passion of curiosity—yet the reason for it was beyond his comprehension. To him the child seemed normal enough, and the nurse was convinced that it was in every particular exactly like anyone else—more imaginative than most perhaps, but then any lonely child might well be that, thrown continually on its own resources.

Another strange thing was that Hext was always at great pains to impress on everybody that Antonia was the most normal little thing in the world, leading the most normal healthy life—yet Orlebar saw that even while he said it, he didn't believe his own words. Yet why not?—why not? His wife was normal enough, even to the verge of dullness. Hext seemed to be always watching; Orlebar would have given worlds to know what he expected to see.

"What is the child doing now, Nanny?" Hext said, in his eager, interested way, from his seat on the fender; and Nanny, who was no student of human nature, but only a very motherly soul, took all his interest for signs of intense affection, and swelled with pride over her charge, whose father was so indulgent, so adoring.

"She's giving a feast to the fairies, bless her heart."

Arthur Hext got up and went over to the child.

"May I join the feast?" he said, looking down, and he spoke as he might have to a great lady.

Antonia was never ill at ease or at a loss; she said "yes" very graciously, adding, "but don't sit there, please—that's Tomaki's place. I keep it for him, although he won't play fairies with me." She made a little sign with one hand, and Hext moved farther round.

"Who is Tomaki?—I always forget—do you expect him?" Always the same question. The man waited intently for the answer.

"He is my greatest friend—he's *always* here." The voice seemed to say, "PLEASE let that be understood."

"'Tomaki' is always there, sir," the nurse said, standing above them and watching the game. "Ever since Miss Antonia has been a tiny thing she's never played a game without him. Almost I do feel that I know him myself, though I've never seen him and never shall. At first it gave me the creeps to hear her talking of another child that was never there, but I've got accustomed to it. She hasn't got a playfellow, you see—so she just imagines one. I think we'd be lonesome without Master Tomaki now."

But the man's attention was with the child. "What is Tomaki like?" he said, in a voice inviting confidences.

"Oh, he's like a boy," Antonia answered, rather bored with grown-up questionings.

"Does he play with you—do you like the same things?"

"No—not always; he likes playing at horses and tigers and shipwrecks and Red Indians—he's always the Red Indian and I'm the scalp—but *I* like fairies and Cinderella and games like that best."

"So you take it in turns?"

"Yes—but"—reluctantly truthful—"Tomaki gets the most turns."

"Why do you let him?"

"'Cos when I don't he makes his tiger growl and pretend to bite me. I gets frightened."

"Don't you cry?"

"Yes, sometimes—not very often; he minds *too* much if I cry."

"Has he always got a tiger with him?"

"Yes, always; it's tied round his neck on a blue ribbon. His mother ties it for him, so he shan't lose it, 'cos if it's lost, he can't go to sleep."

"What's his mother like?"

"Oh, she's just a lady. Have some ham, Daddy, will you? Here's the knife and fork."

"Yes, I see the knife and fork; but where is the ham?"

"That's the ham—that date; don't you think it's like a real one? Please cut it very thin."

"*Can't* you tell me what Tomaki's mother is like?"

"She's tall and thin and grand-looking—oh! you aren't cutting it at all thin."

"His father—Tomaki's father—is he a nice man?"

"Hasn't got a father."

"Oh."

"We only have one father and one mother between us—won't you have some ham too?"

"What is Tomaki's tiger like?"

"Oh, it's a hideous old thing, striped, with green eyes and a broken leg."

Next carved away assiduously with a pair of matches—and the nurse joined again in the con-

versation. "Master Tomaki is a reg'lar boy, sir—very selfish, though Miss Antonia won't have it so. He makes her play all *his* games, she says, but he won't never play *hers*. Fairies aren't for boys, he says—nor yet he won't be the Prince in Cinderella—and he pulls her hair and tears her dresses dreadful. But when she was so ill in the spring he was as good as gold—he sat by her bed all day long. It was him as persuaded her to lie still and drink her medicine, and keep covered up, and try to get well. She wouldn't do nothing for me or the trained nurse. But he told her that if she died, he'd die too. Oh, I was thankful for Master Tomaki in the spring. He's a little demon when she's well—but he's quite different when she's ill."

Hext got up rather suddenly—he seemed to have made up his mind about something—his face was pale with suppressed excitement. "Nurse," he said, "I am going to take Miss Antonia out. Will you please dress her at once. There is "—he hesitated—"a lady —who wants particularly to see her."

The nurse looked astonished, but willing to be obedient.

He turned to the child. "Antonia, will you come out with me?" They looked at each other, these two, who were known to the world as Arthur Hext and Antonia, his little daughter, born in Algiers, his only child—her mother having died in giving her birth—and their eyes were the eyes of strangers.

"Yes," Antonia answered cheerfully, but without enthusiasm. "Come along, Tomaki." She never dreamt of leaving him behind.

It was ten o'clock that night before Antonia was brought back to an amazed, anxious, indignant Nanny, too tired to be asked questions, or, indeed, to do

anything but fall asleep while she was being undressed.

But the next morning, when her charge was sitting up in bed in a dressing-gown—bright-eyed, cheerful, none the worse—Nanny began. " What did the lady say, my lamb ? Why did she keep you so long ? What could your papa have been thinking of ? You should have been in bed four hours before. What was the lady like ? "

Antonia shook back her long dark hair and looked gravely at her Nanny with big blue eyes.

" I thought it was a man," she said ; and that was the only comment she made, either then or any other time.

CHAPTER II

AS a whirlpool draws into its vortex all objects which come within reach of its rush and swirl, be they never so precious, rare, curious, repulsive, or beautiful—to conceal, to bury for ever, or very rarely to yield up again—so through a few hundred years have the slums of London sucked into their impenetrable retreats tragedies innumerable, romances unthinkable, human dramas, histories so weird, so curious as to be far more improbable than any mere invention of man's brain—sordid horrors, fallen greatness, mysteries as deep as the sea. And of all the inexplicable phenomena that ever floated in through these human floodgates, perhaps one of the strangest was a bit of human debris—a clairvoyant, fortune-teller, soothsayer—call him what you will, who was to be found in an opium den somewhere round about the London Docks, a quarter of a century ago.

He was known only to a very few, for only very few cared to penetrate into the filth and dangers of those quarters in those days; yet there are living now in London at least two men—and one woman—who could tell you of him from personal experience.

Wretched, foul, filthy, half mad, sodden with opium, some ship homeward bound had brought him back from China. Arrived in London, he floated out with all the flotsam and jetsam, lost in the immensity, or, rather, he *would* have been lost, but for the one person who followed him up.

On the voyage home he had chanced to come under the notice of a student of race—and of Oriental races in particular; and this man, this student, recognized him as of no ordinary type. He had tried to draw from him his story, his nationality, his age, his birthplace, anything, everything which would throw light on the mystery of his personality, but he had been entirely baffled at every point. This extraordinary old man, shrivelled like a monkey, bald as a coot, dressed like a Chinaman, talking many languages fluently, speaking, above everything, English as pure as that of an Oxford don, but with a strange, slight foreign accent, impossible to trace, with a high, cracked voice, and a laugh like the crunching of bones—this old man had maintained a silence about himself as profound as the silence of the Pharaohs' tombs.

But he told the student things about his *own* past, so true as to be positively staggering; things which he imagined to be locked within his own heart, and his alone. And the student, with bated breath, told others about him—and so his fame went round in a small circle.

Some said he was a Greek, educated at an English university, run amuck in China; some said he was a well-known personage who had long been mysteriously lost; some said this, some said that—but no one *knew*. They only knew, that under the influence of opium he would see strange pictures in some people's eyes—strange pictures of the past, the very far past—for he talked of a thousand years as most men talk of yesterday—the immediate past, and the future; and what he said of the immediate past was so true that many people turned pale and were afraid; for it was as if their past itself rose up and spoke to them.

Sometimes people journeyed to him in vain, for he was oddly perverse, arbitrary, and obstinate, and often refused to look or utter, huddling himself up on his filthy bed, apparently deaf and blind to the world. Only when funds were low, he would, in return for gold, take his pipe, growling and grumbling the while, lie back against the wall, and gaze out at the subject's face with half-closed eyes.

Then, as the opium gained influence on him, he would suddenly lean forward, and begin talking fast and fluently, telling strange stories, no two alike. "Soko sees," he would say, "Soko sees your soul's journeys in your eyes." And, curiously enough, the stories of the very far past he told in the language of a prophet, but the stories of the immediate past, and those of the future, he told in the modern spirit, but with curious, half-foreign turns and phrasings.

To some, moreover, he had nothing to say, and told them so quite clearly. "You have *no* stories," he would say; "a thousand years hence, perhaps"—and turn on his horrible rags, deaf to all further persuasions. Only once, when someone had been more than usually importunate, he had raised himself angrily:

"Go, before I spit on you," he growled out. "Don't you know that you have not yet completed your first evolution—that your mother was like unto a good, kind cow, and your father a horse of high mettle—and you are a fitting son of the twain, for your intelligence is less than the monkey's. A heart you have—yes!—the heart of a dog—but intelligence, knowledge, understanding—pah! What past have you, therefore, whose first evolution is not completed? What stories could I tell you that would be more interesting than the doings of the chief rooster in the farmyard?"

"The truest thing ever said," came the verdict from the clubs when the story was repeated, for the man in question was not remarkable for his intellectual capacity, though undoubtedly a nice, kind person, full of animal courage.

They were a strange collection who went to see this curious being—soldiers, sailors, politicians, doctors, idlers, psychologists, a very dashing duchess, a famous actress and others ; but the strangest sight of all was when a man and a child appeared together, the man, obviously a gentleman, aged about thirty-seven, the child aged only four.

That any man should take a child into such dangers and degradation would have amazed anyone who had seen them, but nobody more so than the man himself. He had fought against the desire a thousand times, had given up all idea of going, had assured himself over and over again of the utter impossibility of such a step—and in the end it had been too strong for him. He was haunted by the child's eyes ; she gave him a strange feeling of the past—he was something of a theosophist himself—he wanted to know what Soko would say of her. If the old man said that there were no stories in her face, then he would be at peace ; but if Soko saw stories, he wanted to know them ; he couldn't rest or eat or sleep until he did. It was a madness, an obsession—and it was stronger than he.

They stood together before the low entrance, the man and the child, and the man gave the accustomed signal, without which no one was admitted for fear of police raids. And while they waited the child gazed about her wonderingly—a child with long dark hair and wide eyes, the colours of which were all mixed up

—blue and yellow and grey—like the paints on an artist's palette.

Fortunately for her nerves, she was at the age when children are hardly astonished at anything. If mother suddenly grew horns, or father turned into an elephant, or Nanny became a pillar of salt, at four years of age it wouldn't strike little people as anything so very out-of-the-way.

At last, in reply to the signal, an old, filthy, hag-like woman shuffled to the latch and let them in, and they passed on to the black hole where Soko was lying inert upon his rags. He might have been dead for all the life he showed. The old woman kicked, cajoled, abused and snivelled over him in turn, for she, too, had an interest in the gold, and at last he roused himself. It was like Amenophis, the Egyptian mummy, making a stupendous effort and coming back to life.

"For the child," the man said, and led the child forward by the hand. She stood looking at Soko with wide-open eyes, too awed to speak or cry, and Soko looked at her, and his sunken, bloodshot eyes seemed to fix upon her, fascinated, like the eyes of a snake, and his tongue shot backwards and forwards, wetting his lips, which were thin as threads. He asked for a candle, and held it up near the child's face—and still he looked, and the child looked back at him.

Then he threw the candle on the ground, dabbing the flame out with his fingers in the grease—and he lay back on his rags and held out his hand for his pipe.

"There are many stories in her eyes," he said, "many, many—give me the pipe quickly." The old hag shuffled up and took the gold from the man and gave the pipe to Soko.

And the man and the child waited.

At last Soko began to speak and murmur unintelligibly, and gradually it got clearer and clearer, till the man could hear what he was saying, and after a long preface, the story suddenly became distinct and continuous.

At the end of the first story the man was all eagerness to hear more; he passed more gold into the hag's hands, and the hag gave Soko another pipe, and he began another story, gesticulating dramatically, gazing always at the child.

A third time they passed gold between them, a third time Soko told his story, and this time it was shorter, and connected with the man, causing him a strange and violent emotion. Finally the man emerged, agitated and shaken to the foundations of his being; he took the child home, and proceeded to lock himself up in his study, where he remained for many hours, writing furiously on large pieces of foolscap paper.

Anyone watching him would have said that he was trying to remember, that he had something definite in his mind that he was endeavouring to transfer to paper; and yet it was also easy to see that he was not in a normal state of mind or health, that he was working at tremendous pressure, that he seemed to be in great pain, pain the excitement in his brain rendered vague and secondary. It would have puzzled a looker-on to decide whether he was writing in delirium, or whether he was merely working against time—yet when it was finished, the document, written as follows, purported to be one of the stories Soko had told, in the manner that he told it.

CHAPTER III

IN slow, drawling tones, with long pauses between the sentences, as one who talks in his sleep, dreaming the while with open eyes, seeing, yet not seeing, Soko spoke:

"Far away—so far that there is no map to mark the spot—lost, forgotten in the dust of countless generations—obscured behind the veil of a thousand ages—SUNK—rocked to oblivion at the bottom of a boundless sea—naught but a coral reef with a billion rolling, booming waves thundering eternally over its grave—there lies the once mighty civilization which men, guessing, now call 'Atlantis.'

"A name, ye gods—what is it? Lost, forgotten, buried!—yes, perhaps!"—he nodded his head, and his eyes glittered strangely, while his voice had a sort of mock in it, as one who scoffs at an inferior intelligence—"like the body of some great master-mind of the earth who dies at sea, and whose remains are lowered into the waves below. A moment's watching, a spasm of pain, a clutching at the heart and throat, a little splash—and they are gone—buried in the infinite, lost to every human sense. And those who loved best that body and spirit, and who stay behind, feel that there is nothing left—nothing left. Not even a sacred, silent spot on hallowed ground, or graven stone tablet, inscribed with words few and brief enough, serving, nevertheless, to tell the generations that

follow what manner of man it was who lies buried at their feet.

"Nothing left, they cry, nothing—but oblivion.

"Yet who can *dare* to say it?" He started forward fiercely, his eyes round and hard, his voice harsh and grating. "For the thoughts he thought, this great one of the earth, buried in the sea, the dreams he dreamed, the music he made or the art he breathed, the courage he imparted, the hatreds he invoked, the love he gave, the loves inspired—*these live!*" Gradually, as he spoke, he fell back again, recumbent, and his voice became once more the voice of a dreamer, low, continuous.

"On and on through endless ages do they live—for who can tell which is the beginning and where the end of things intangible and of the spirit? Can a woman remain for ever young, rich, beautiful, happy? No—nor thou, City of my heart. Thou hadst thy day—the richest, fullest day—and in thy prime thou passedst away. Can any man ask more of fate?" His voice rose like an invocation: "City of light—thou whom men call 'Atlantis,' speaking doubtfully, as of a shadow, half remembered, Thou, the fairest and bravest, capital of a great and glowing land, look back and count the mighty spirits thou bredst amongst thy sons and daughters. Dreamers some were, dreamers, whose dreams evolved themselves into marble palaces, noble fountains and waterways, sparkling minarets, temples of splendour and magnificence, courtyards of mother-of-pearl, gates of wrought iron and brass and gold, gardens of luxury and languor to do thee honour—and soldiers others were, whose aims and energies were all directed 'gainst thy foes, acquiring knowledge and riches in other lands, and ever bringing back from

victory all that was best in brains and blood and spoil—and women, strong and beautiful, who played great parts in the great whole—and poets, philosophers, sculptors, thinkers, law-givers—*lovers*—lovers whose spirits wander still, having not yet found their highest expression. Atlantis, of all this richness that once was thine, and now lies for ever buried in the sea—who *dares* to say that there is nothing left ? "

As ever, after reaching any height of excitement, he subsided, his voice broke, his utterances became incoherent until, out of his ravings, the thread of his story unwound itself again, even as a man leaves the shadows and mazes of the wood, to take once more to the road that lies like a silver ribbon under his feet and before him in the magic moonlight.

" And over this land Prince Tanga ruled—the grandson and regent of the old blind King Hammo.

" Now Tanga was beloved by the people for three reasons : first, because he led his troops in person to the wars, and, where all men were brave, he was ever the foremost and the bravest ; secondly, because in peace he was just and upright, caring more for the people's welfare than his own ; thirdly, because in his life there was something of mystery. For wise and great men know that if they would retain the love of the multitude, they must place a wall of mystery between it and them, just so high that the common herd cannot look over, but not high enough to give the impression of arrogance or inaccessibility.

" And the people looked towards Tanga to marry and have sons, and it was the one thing for their good that he withheld from them. And it was bruited abroad that Tanga had no wish to mate, and that, moreover, he had vowed a vow to remain unwed, until he met his

twin-soul. 'To do any otherwise were to be like unto the beasts of the field, with no more discrimination than they,' he said; and the people wondered greatly, and yet loved him the more for it. 'What a lover he will make,' the women said one to another—and all the world loves a lover.

"And in the years of peace, when the wars called him not forth, it was the custom of Tanga to withdraw from the public gaze for three months out of the twelve, leaving the ministry to a council of fifteen, saying that he had need of these months of rest, to think his own thoughts, to study and introspect, to avoid becoming a mere puppet of State, to measure his strength against others on a common footing, without the flattery of courtiers, to be alone, to learn intimately the innermost hearts of his people, to seek for his bride. And lo! north and south and east and west he sought her, and no man knew whither he went or by what means he travelled.

"All these things about him were mysteries to his people, and they worshipped him almost as a god.

"Now it perchanced that in the same three months that Tanga made his retreat from the eyes of the world a wanderer appeared in the various smaller towns round and about the River Bunda. About the same season he came yearly, and the people looked for his coming, calling him the 'Silent Wanderer.'

"Young he was, a score and a half of years, and dark and strong, and when he smiled his teeth flashed white, and the smile crept up into his yellow eyes. And though it was clear that he had no wish to draw attention to himself, but would wander through the land, interfering with no man, there was a quality about him, strange and indescribable, causing men to look at him and

speak civilly, and women to look once, and look again.

"And the children worshipped him, following like sheep, sitting around him listening eagerly to his tales, for though to others he had naught to say, to the children he was ever nimble-tongued.

"And the mothers knew that his influence was all for good, and they liked him for his kindness to their babes, and the men had a feeling of good-fellowship for him also, for his rough knowledge of medicine and readiness to lend a helping hand in times of trouble. But if any would hold him back to show their gratitude, offering him bread and wine and hospitality, he would pass on quickly, bluffly, without good-bye or salutation. 'I ask nothing, I want nothing,' he would say, 'but to be free of ties, the blue sky above my head, the white road beneath my feet, an endless possibility in the morrow.'

"It was rumoured, too, that he bathed daily in the river, and the people thought him eccentric. They said that he was one with nature, and that the great spirit of unrest had claimed him for her own.

"So they laughed and shrugged their shoulders as each year brought him thither again—but the children looked eagerly for his coming.

It perchanced one evening that he led a little boy down to the river to bathe, and he undressed the child, sending him, laughing joyously, into the waters; but when he would dress him again, lo! he found that he knew not how to replace his garments. He turned them this way and that, not knowing the top from the bottom, and became greatly confused and bewildered, albeit half amused. And looking up, he saw a woman on the bank above him, laughing at his helplessness. Young she was,

and beautiful, with hair like a raven's wing, crowned with a wreath of jasmine. Her lips were red with carmine, her cheeks stained with vermilion, the gold and silver bangles clashed together loudly on her arms and ankles, and he knew her for a dancing-girl of the town. And almost he turned away from her again, thinking there was no help to be found in her, and yet he turned not entirely, for in her eyes he caught the shadow of a tiny flame which seemed to answer something in his own. So he addressed himself unto her, saying, 'Couldst help me with the child? The evening draweth in and getteth cold, and I know not one of these garments from another.'

"But she only laughed again, shaking her head, and her golden earrings caught the rays of the setting sun.

"So he continued: 'Then I am forced to suppose that thou knowest no better than I do,' and sitting down again, he spread out the garments before him, taking careful note of the fastenings, and ignoring the woman further, as if she were not there.

"She waited a moment, watching, and then gathered up her drapery around her, and came and stood a little nearer unto him. 'Then must I teach thee otherwise,' she said, and her voice was low and of surprising quality. 'Hold thou up to me the garments, and I will tell thee which to put on first.' He turned towards her, holding up the garments one by one—and she pointed to the first, but lo! in his foolishness and manlike helplessness he could not put it on aright, try as he would.

"And at last he held out all the garments to her beseechingly—with a smile in his eyes.

"And the woman looked at him, and the laughter died out of her face, and she answered him, saying,

'Art thou a simpleton that thou knowest me not? Canst see what the mother of the child would say if she saw me with but one finger laid upon it—for what have I to do with these? She pointed to the child, and the manner of her saying it was hard and scornful, as one who says, 'Who would be a housewife and a mother who could be a queen amongst men, like me?' But the man did not believe her—and knew that the tone was adopted to hide a hurt. For he had learnt many lessons from women—many, but not all.

"He answered, 'Yet the mother entrusted the child with me for these short hours, to do with as seemeth unto me good, and still I pray thee, once again, of thy goodness and gentleness to help me with the child.' And they looked in each other's eyes, and this time the eyes of the woman fell, and she stood some moments hesitating, and then came swiftly down to the water's edge, took the child gently from the man's hands, and kneeling at his little feet, dressed him with deft fingers, laughing softly all the time.

"And the hands of the man and the woman touched each other, and the scent of the jasmine in her hair was wafted towards him on the evening breeze, and the man felt himself all thrilling as he never felt before.

"When she had finished the dressing, she took the child's face between her two hands and kissed him on the forehead, and the child smiled and kissed her back.

"And she looked hastily at the wanderer, as one who has been caught doing some wrong thing, expecting to be chid. But he was idly throwing pebbles in the river, and pretended to have seen nothing—yet all the time the beauty of her, and something half wayward and half pathetic in her eyes, had moved him strangely.

"And to himself he said, 'Women there are,

entirely virtuous, by the grace of circumstances, whose hearts are like unto the hearts of a courtesan; and women of the town there are whose hearts, in spite of everything, remain like unto the heart of a child.'

"So thinking, he thanked the woman, looking into her eyes, and, standing aside for her to pass before him, he led the child back to his mother.

"That night, when the stars came out, he wandered restlessly along the river-bank, leaving the loneliness behind him, which was not according to his wont, and followed the stream into the town, where it flowed beside the busy market-place.

"The boat of a great prince lay tied up beside the long white marble steps of the quay, against which the waters were lapping lazily, and the boat was decorated with a myriad lamps of oil and wick, and with silken rugs and rolls of gold and silver cloth, for the Prince was feasting with a large company.

"When the feast was over, he despatched a messenger to the janitor of the bazaar, commanding him to send forthwith the cleverest and most beautiful dancing girl of the town to amuse his guests.

"The wanderer heard the women grumbling one to another, 'It will be Cyra; mark thou my words. Not thou or I or another; but Cyra, always Cyra.'

"Now the meaning of 'Cyra' was 'jasmine.' And presently a litter passed by the wanderer, carried by the slaves of the bazaar, and it was bound for the boat of the Prince.

"As it passed, the curtains hanging thereon fluttered in the light breeze, and there was borne to him from within their folds the scent of jasmine.

"He felt his heart tighten and flutter strangely, and it came to him that the woman they carried therein

was the woman who had helped him with the child, whose face he was looking for even then among the crowd, though he knew it not until that moment.

"And the desire came upon him to know beyond all doubt if it was she, and in the darkness he boarded the vessel unseen, and hidden behind a silken hanging, he watched for the dancer. When she came he knew that his intuition had not played him false—it was the dancing-girl of the river-bank. And if before he thought her beautiful, he saw now that her beauty exceeded all that he had ever dreamed of.

"She stood before the assembled company, her arms, neck, and ankles bare and gleaming white, her long black hair streaming to her knees, caught into her neck with a clasp of bright blue moonstones, her garment blue and silver—the blue of a summer night—and her great eyes the colour of her garment, but changeable as the sea. Carelessly she stood there, glancing round, dissatisfied with something, disdainful, not attempting to begin.

"And presently, clapping her hands with haughty gesture, she commanded a slave to bring her precious ointment, essence of jasmine; and when it arrived in a bowl of beaten gold, she cast it about her in leisurely fashion, taking her own time, shaking the drops from her finger-tips.

"'Only when the night has been perfumed for me can I dance,' she said; 'for who could dance to the perfume of a dead feast?' She made a little grimace, and when she had done with the bowl, she threw it out into the waters; and they all laughed delightedly, for her indifference pleased and amused them.

"And they threw flowers at her, saying, 'A lotus for thy white skin, dancer'; 'A rose for thy red lips.'

"But she caught them with a careless dexterity, throwing them back again over her shoulder: 'A white rose for the most wicked'; 'A withered blossom for the oldest.'

"But a bunch of jasmine she caught and held, tucking it into her bosom, saying, 'No—myself I throw not back to any man, for there are none who take my fancy —save only one, and *he* asketh me not.'

"They questioned her, saying, 'What manner of man is he?'

"She laughed, shaking her head. 'He hath white teeth, yellow eyes, and a smile that creeps into my heart.'

"Now each man thought it was himself, even the Prince, who was old and fat and repulsive. And he answered her insinuatingly, saying:

"'And in his hand he held a golden purse, that was ever open to the most beautiful; didst see it, Cyra?'

"But she answered dreamily, 'Verily, I noticed it not—for in his other hand, which seemed to me both strong and brown, he held something more precious than gold—the joy of a woman's heart; something small and frail, which he guarded zealously, even as befits a man of his stature.'

"And they wondered, all of them, and the Wanderer's heart leapt within him, for he knew that his eyes were yellow and his teeth white—other women had told him often, though he heeded them not. Nevertheless, he did not dare to dwell upon it, for fear that he was mistaken.

"But suddenly the mood of the dancer changed, and she stamped her foot, commanding them like a young queen:

"'Smoke, unworthy sons of unworthy fathers;

smoke, I tell ye, till the clouds roll heavily, blotting out thy faces from my sight, until, in the dimness, perchance, I shall be able to imagine ye to be higher things, such as trees, or the friendly cacti—for the faces of men fetter my feet and chain my spirit to the earth, but the face of nature lends enchantment.'

"Then the Wanderer said to himself, 'Truly, I have never seen another like unto her. She is a hundred different women in one'; and looking round the ring of faces, he saw that every man's eyes were fixed upon the dancer, but the eyes of the Prince himself were fixed the most earnestly, even as the eyes of a snake fix themselves upon a dove.

"And his heart blazed within him, and he longed to pluck her from it all, as a brand is plucked from the burning.

"Presently she arose amidst the vapours of smoke, and began to dance, as a child dances for its own pleasure, making neither obeisance nor acknowledgment to any man. Indeed, towards their host, the Prince, she had looked once only, and then quickly away, as if the sight of him wounded her eyes. But to the younger men she smiled and spoke a little.

"And she danced as the flowers nod in the grass, as the drops of water dance in a fountain, as the petals flutter from the plum trees—and the Wanderer forgot that he was hiding, while his eyes feasted on her exquisite grace, and he came forward from the place of his concealment. And he forgot that he loathed the dust of cities, and abhorred the life of a dancing-girl, forgot it wilfully, for he had always known that when he saw the twin flame to the flame of his own soul, burning in a woman's eyes, all else would fade away into insignificance.

"And the dancer continued to sway and rise and fall, unconsciously, as one who moves in a dream, till suddenly, in the midst of it all, her eyes encountered the eyes of the Wanderer, full of longing as they were, intent upon her; and she gave a little cry, and instantly stopped dancing, remaining motionless, as one who has received a hurt, her face buried in her hands. And the Wanderer withdrew quickly behind his curtain of silk, and all the company gazed at the dancer in astonishment, seeking the cause of her stillness.

"Suddenly she burst out laughing, crying, 'I dance no more, sons of the night, for there is one among ye who robs me of my inspiration, even as the earth throws her shadow over the moon, eclipsing its brightness'—and she flung herself on the ground, pettishly, resting her chin on her hands, and kicking gently with her toes.

"The men were greatly amused, for she was different to all other dancing-girls, who sought only to please, smiling continually. And they came before her, one after another, saying, 'Cyra, is it I?'

"And she looked up naughtily, hardly looking, indeed, peeping between her hair or her fingers—and at every man she shook her head.

"And at last there was no man left who had not been before her, though she knew it not, save only the Prince and the Wanderer.

"And they said, 'Lo, it is none of us! Then must we search the boat, for surely there is someone concealed thereon of whose presence we are unaware.'

"But when she heard those words, her heart almost stopped beating, for she knew she had placed the Wanderer in great danger—that if they found him they

would surely kill him—and the thought of this turned her sick.

" So she sat up suddenly, and pointed quickly at the old, fat Prince.

" ' Thou,' she said : ' it is thou.'

" And the others crowded round her, astonished, dismayed, fearful of his anger, saying, ' Cyra, it is the Prince ! It is the Prince—our host ! '

" But the Prince was amused by her audacity, and he waved them aside, saying, ' Leave her to speak with me. A great artist may claim great privileges.'

" And she was very clever, and bandied words with him, soothing him down, and at the same time talking in parables, the meanings of which were for the ear of the Wanderer alone—giving him to understand that he must depart quickly, for until after his departure she would not dance, neither would she be responsible much longer for the keeping of the peace.

" The Wanderer smiled within himself, knowing what she knew not, that if he chose, he could step forward and command the vessel, by token of the royal signet which hung around his neck.

" But it was not thus that he had dreamed of coming into his own, so he slipped away at her bidding, laughing somewhat at the manner of his coming and going.

" When she saw that he had gone, she rose and danced again, so that the Prince was greatly enamoured of her beauty, wit, and strange attraction, though she would have none of him.

" Nevertheless, he hoped to win her on the following night.

" And the next day, towards even, when the hours of great heat were over-past, the Wanderer went again to the river, and found the dancer sitting on the banks,

weaving garlands of jasmine, and singing softly to herself, her tiring-woman awaiting her some little way off.

"And he went and stood near her, and they looked in each other's eyes, saying nothing of what had passed, by an unspoken consent. And he sat down beside her, and they talked of simple things, laughing joyously the while. Of birds and butterflies, of flowers and trees, of the river and the moon and the stars they spoke, and she told him stories of her fancy, looking the while like a child of morning. And her manner of telling her stories was very quaint; and while she spoke his eyes feasted on the beauty of her.

"And the Wanderer's character had many sides, for albeit that he lacked no manly qualities, but rather had an added number, there were twists and turns to his mind that were very subtle—yet the mind of the dancer was in some things even subtler than his own.

"And where she was not subtle, through want of knowledge, she was very simple, assuming nothing, and her fancies delighted him, and her simplicity amazed him.

"He said to himself, 'Truly her nature must be as the nature of a princess, yet richer in grace than any I have ever met. For this I know, that only the great in soul could compass this.'

"So he watched her closely as she smiled and talked, waving her little hands, and he knew that she was brave and proud and full of spirit, with something gentle in her heart. For in her starry eyes, unconscious as they were, there lay the shadow of pain, and he saw that though the world had struck her hard, in its brutal, callous way, there was that in her soul, a

refinement, which made her unable, unwilling, to give back blow for blow.

"When he saw this look in her eyes his soul raged within him, and he longed fiercely to protect her from all evil.

"They sat there side by side in the quiet shadows, and there was something in the nature of each that gave to the other a sense of perfection.

"Meanwhile the sun stole towards the west, dropping to his couch below the horizon, and the sky became red and purple and yellow, and its splendour was reflected on the earth. And the whole world turned rose and gold, each blade of grass becoming a tiny flame—and even as this miracle was wrought, the feelings of the man changed subtly.

"The slimness of her feet, which up till now had only entered into his eye, beat upon his brain, the whiteness of her hands and arms throbbed with every pulse-beat, her little ear became a miracle, her eyes two mysteries of untold fascination, the curve of her neck a poem, the scent of her rose up like incense, turning him giddy.

"And he never took his eyes away from her, knowing full well that it needed but a touch of her white, scented hands to set the world afire.

"And the magic of the moment moved her also, and he saw that she became conscious of herself and him.

"Yet because he had found her as he had, because the manner of her life was such—he would have died rather than break his dream and treat her in any way discourteously.

"And he turned away from her at last, when the impulse to play with the bangles on her feet became

too strong for him, saying abruptly, 'Last night—why wouldst not let them find me?' And she, too, turned away, as one affronted slightly, answering, 'Last night—what has last night to do with the evening of to-day—or either with the unknown morrow?'

"And he answered her, knowing full well that his saying would annoy her:

"'Yet thou wert kind, caring enough to exercise thy wit and ingenuity!'

"She laughed lightly, making answer: 'A woman's whim, what is it but something lighter than a feather, having neither rhyme nor reason?'

"And he answered, speaking slowly: 'Yet was my presence not altogether indifferent to thee, since either from pleasure or displeasure thou wouldst dance no more, having discovered it?'

"And she was angry, saying impatiently, 'What right hast thou to ask me questions, and plague me in my hours of tranquillity, whose name I do not even know?'

"He said, 'Men call me the "Silent Wanderer."'

"And she laughed, saying, 'Silent Wanderer, for one who is silent thou knowest well how to speak, methinks. Yet will I be fair to thee. Men call *me* "Cyra."'

"And he answered in a dream, 'I know it—I have always known it.'

"She looked at him astonished; and when he saw the astonishment in her eyes, he answered lightly, as one who plays a game, 'For know, Cyra, that I am a great magician—that I can turn the wind into a gossamer garment to wrap around thee, making thee more queenly than a queen, and the stars into stones for thy diadem, and the dewdrops into glittering

jewels for thy neck, and the rainbow into a dancing dress of many colours—for what are the trappings of riches and power but the exercise of profound imagination? But these, thy jewels, shall be real—real. And under my touch, the rays of the sun shall be thy palace, and the moon thy bower of delight—and I shall offer thee a choice of gifts—riches, wisdom, love—and thou shalt choose—choose—remembering only that each gift is single, unattached to either two, and that only one of them is worth the choosing—but which that is, I leave to thy unaided judgment.'

" While he spoke, he got upon his knees and knelt before her, as one who plays a game seriously, and she sat on, facing him in the dying sun, clasping her knees with her two white hands. And she looked at him strangely, hearkening to his words, and presently she made answer: ' Listen, Wanderer—I will tell thee a story:

" ' For know that once there was a bird of Paradise, and because her plumage was gay and pleasing to the eye, men followed her greedily, to pluck the feathers from her tail. And in the hand of every man there was a cage. And the bird looked in the faces of the men, and those who carried the golden cages were always ugly and old and repulsive, and she would have none of them, sending them about their business with pecks and scratches—yet it seemed only to please them the more, for they came back again—and yet again.

" ' And the men who carried the silver cages pleased her no better: they were wise perchance, but wisdom is old and cold and calculating, and the bird thought less than nothing of it.

" ' And of men who carried copper cages there was only one—perchance because the bird's plumage

was bright, and those who could afford neither gold nor silver had not the courage to approach so gay a bird. For though they may have known that nothing in this world is real, save only the things of the heart and spirit, yet they did not credit the bird with a similar understanding, since she was only a bird of Paradise.

" ' And the man with the copper cage approached her differently, keeping the cage hidden behind his back. And he talked with her gently of beautiful things. And when at last he showed his cage, she looked in his face and liked it greatly ; yet she was sad, for until that moment their relations one to another had been to her as an oasis in the desert to a traveller who is very weary.'

" And as she finished speaking, the Wanderer's heart leapt within him, and it was as if a hand had closed about it roughly, twisting it, causing him great joy and pain.

" He answered softly, ' Tell me only of the man who offered the bird a *nest*—not cages of gold or silver or copper, but a homely nest, made of straw by his own hands, worth nothing, costing nothing but the homage of his heart.'

" The woman looked at him, and her lips trembled in a smile, while her eyes filled with tears, and she rose to her feet, turning away to hide them. And she answered :

" ' Thou makest mock of me—for there is *no man* who would offer the bird of Paradise a nest—thou knowest it well.'

" And the Wanderer sprang to his feet, his face aflame, and his arms ached to snatch and hold her, for as a flash of lightning reveals the dark corners of a room,

so did the sight of tears in her eyes reveal to him the depths of his heart.

"And he knew that love had come, that he had arrived at the end of his long journey, had found the completion of his being, the answer to his question, the highest expression of his soul.

"For himself he knew this well, beyond all shadow of doubt—but for her he felt uncertain, unconvinced. And being a strong man, he wished to win, not plunder, to be given unto freely, not to take by force.

"So he went warily, wishing to prove her, knowing well that happiness is elusive as a dream. For what constituted *his* happiness might not be hers; moreover, he knew also that he had great issues to consider—for he was not only himself, an individual, but the Captain of a great ship of State. So, though his arms ached, he only answered her gently, saying:

"'There are some things about men that the bird of Paradise has yet to learn—lessons of healing—not hurting. For all men are not like unto ravening wolves, and a few there are with ideals of their own. For the relationship of which thou speakest is one that any man may have for any woman, but the combination of which I speak, a relation of soul and mind and body, in equal perfection, he can only have for one. And when a man finds this, he seeks no farther, neither does he concern himself with the past.'

"And the woman came and stood before him, and her voice was low and uneven, and she said:

"'Then thou wouldst have me believe that even a bird of Paradise may have a nest?'

"And he smiled, saying, 'Even a bird of Paradise—hath she but a little hope and trust.'

"She answered dreamily, saying, 'Yet I had always

thought that her only end might be—oblivion '—and though he tried to answer her, he could not for the emotion that held him by the throat.

" Presently she turned to him quickly, saying, ' And thou—what wilt thou do, when thou findest this —this combination of which thou speakest ? '

" He answered her, saying, ' I shall look only to the present and the future, caring not if she be princess —or yonder tiring-woman.'

" In spite of her emotion, the dancer laughed between her tears, saying :

" Strange talk indeed for thee, O Wanderer with the threadbare coat.'

" And the Wanderer took a step away from her, and for a moment he was taken aback, and then he smiled, looking at his shabby garments.

" ' Yea—thou art right ; for what have I to offer any woman, save only the things, perchance, she wanteth not ? Yet such is my fancy—and it doeth no harm to anyone.'

" When he had finished speaking, the woman found that suddenly, without warning, the whole aspect of the world had changed for her. For that is life—an instant, and one does not love—the next, one loves—though it is not given to everyone to be conscious of the moment.

" She knew that she loved the Wanderer, loved him for the smile in his eyes, and the strength of his body, and the quality of his mind, and because he was poor and lonely and a wanderer—so poor, so lonely, that perchance she, even she, were not altogether unfitting as a mate.

" And she flung herself at his feet, saying, ' Take me, take me with thee. To-morrow, when thou

startest on thy wanderings, let me wander with thee. I ask nothing but to share thy crust and the white road thou lovest beneath thy feet, and the blue sky above thy head—and the wind shall be my garment, and the stars my diadem, even as thou saidst.'

"But the Wanderer knew that it *could* not be like this; moreover, he wished to prove her. So he raised her gently, saying, 'It is impossible; yet trust to me, stay behind for just one year—and in one year I shall be back.'

"But the woman cried out, 'No, for I am not strong enough to be left behind. Only take me with thee, for what can thy reason be? Am I not beautiful enough—see—my hair is long and thick and reacheth to my knees; my skin—they say it is softer than silk; my eyes, my mouth—do they not please thee?' She leant towards him, her face just below his own, and he did not dare look into her great dark blue eyes, in case the blood should rush too quickly to his head; so he dug his foot into the sand, looking down, and making answer, 'No—because thou art a woman, and too beautiful, thou makest it impossible.'

"And she laughed again, delightedly, catching his meaning, and she stamped her little foot with joy, clashing all her anklets.

"'No—not too beautiful—for thus can I be everything that thou desirest.'

"She came to him and laid the palm of her hand across his lips—and there was something slow and subtle and marvellously seductive in her action.

"But the Wanderer had set himself a task, the greatest he had yet undertaken, and the strength of his mind was equal unto it. So he removed her hand

gently, saying, 'It is impossible—because I honour and respect you far too greatly.'

"And she looked down, and the flush upon her neck rose unto her temples, and the heart of the Wanderer yearned for her.

"And he took one step away from her, and one step back to her, and taking her two hands, he held them between his own, and he looked down upon her tenderly, saying:

"'Listen to me carefully, for I have a plan. We are wanderers on the road of life, thou and I, each one as lonely as the other. If I have loved thee, I have asked for nothing, not even a kiss from thy red lips—thou knowest it well. Therefore, I pray thee, trust thyself unto me. A little faith is all I ask thee now. For the present, think of me not as a man, but as a comrade. In one year, I have given thee my word, I shall come back for thee. But, in the meantime, since men must live, take this—'tis nothing but the barest existence—and live, live differently—dreaming beautiful dreams, weaving thy strange fancies. And think of it, not as a gift from man to woman, but as the pilgrim's crust, made sweeter by sharing it with another. And every morning when I awake, I shall be dreaming of a veil of hair, and every night when I go to sleep, I shall pray to two star-like eyes; and every time that I am sad, two white arms will creep about my neck, and every time that I am glad, two red lips will smile beneath my own. And it will be unto me a talisman and an inspiration, giving me courage for the day's work—for of work in the next year I shall have enough and to spare. And when the year is over I shall come back, and if thou wilt, thou shalt repay me a hundredfold. Thou shalt be more to me than woman ever was

to man, and all my dreams shall be as pale shadows of the living truth.'

" When he had finished speaking he released her hands lingeringly, leaving, placed between them, a little bag of gold.

" But a woman's heart is liable at all times to be ravaged by conflicting emotions, to be slave to a single thought.

" And Cyra knew that he was right, and the knowledge filled her with rage. She thought only that she had been thrown back upon herself, baffled, denied ; and in the darkness of anger that filled her heart, there shone no light from the torch of faith. Moreover, there was one thing he had forgotten—the order of her life had not been such as to breed faith in men, but rather the contrary, and the pride of the dancing-girl rose in revolt, that her persuasions had been unavailing.

" She looked at the gold and saw that it was plenty, and the devil entered into her. She opened the bag and cast the pieces from her, scattering them in every direction.

" Then she gathered up her garments, laughing coldly. ' Silent Wanderer,' she said, ' men have misnamed thee. Well hast thou beguiled my hours of play, for methinks thou talkest very prettily.'

" She summoned her palanquin, clapping her hands imperiously, and the slaves carried her swiftly back to the town.

" And when she had gone the Wanderer laughed, looking at the scattered pieces, not deigning to pick up so much as one of them.

" ' She hath spirit,' he said to himself ; ' she hath a fine spirit—and the gain of gold is nothing to her.'

" And he was glad and full of hope and sorrowful at

the same time ; yet he knew he had been right to prove her—for what is love without faith ?—but a tree without the sap of life.

" The next evening he went again to the river, and the dancing-girl was there also ; and this time she was not alone, but surrounded by a circle of men, with her tiring-woman in attendance. And she looked very beautiful, but reckless and somehow wicked—for her little mouth was over-reddened, and her eyes were over-dark, and her cheeks were too vermilion, and the clash of her bangles over-loud and insistent. She was wild, too, and gay, talking, dancing, laughing, and at every fresh sally her circle bent with merriment. And the Wanderer felt sick at heart, and he stood watching her, and presently their eyes met, and suddenly he went towards her roughly, putting the other men aside without ceremony or respect, having no thought but to snatch her from where she stood. And they made way for him unquestioningly, because of the manner of authority that was his, as of one accustomed to obedience.

" He went straight to her, on the impulse of his heart, and held out his hand, having no speech prepared, expecting only that she would place her hand within his own, and pass away with him into the beyond.

" But the woman looked at him with a veiled and smiling insolence, as if they had never met before ; and she raised her finger and pointed scornfully, saying something slighting and derisive. And the other men began to resent the intrusion, taking their tone from the woman, and they tried to jostle him, saying rude things.

" But the Wanderer freed himself from them vigorously, and after that they left him alone ; and

yet, in his mind, he had noticed them not, for brawling was very far from his intention, and all his mind and eyes and faculties were centred on the woman, and the men were to him no more than sheep.

"And he commanded her, saying, 'Leave these fools and come with me.' And in her heart she loved him for it, yet she continued to laugh, saying, 'I know thee not.' And she made jest of his poverty and his threadbare coat, saying, 'Yea, now do I remember the fellow; a few words we spake together yester-evening by the river. And he boasted to me of princesses—and I was amused and listened to his talk.'

"And not her words, but her manner of saying them, cut him like a whip, and he said to her, 'Then ye would have me go?'

"And she answered, 'Yea, I wait but for that moment.'

"And he stepped back, withdrawing from the circle, and yet once more he turned towards her, and he stood there patiently. And in his yellow eyes there was a look of quiet assurance, and the message of them seemed to say, 'I know thee better than thou knowest thyself. Send me not away, for we have need of each other.'

"Her eyes read the message, and her heart nearly gave way, but her body still stood there with pointed finger, scornful, derisive, showing no slightest sign of yielding.

"And he said quietly, 'If thou shouldst ever change—send me but a thought—it will arrive.' And she snapped her fingers, answering quickly, 'This thought only will I ever send thee, beggar—that thou livest with thy princess, as far away from me as possible.'

"It was as if her tongue spake without permission.

And the Wanderer thought that it was hopeless, that he had come too late, that her soul was blackened against him, and turning, he picked up his staff, and walked slowly away into the desolation of the setting sun, never once looking back.

"The woman watched him go with a sob in her throat, laughing bravely all the time; but when he was out of sight her mood changed, and she dismissed her circle; passionately she dismissed them, stamping her feet, clapping her hands. And they were more than ever amused by her changing moods, and they went reluctantly, for her beauty and variation pleased them.

"And when the last of them had gone she turned, and stretching out her arms towards the far distance, whither the Wanderer had passed, she flung herself down upon the earth, and lay there all through the night, weeping her heart out.

"In the year that followed there were wars in the land, and Prince Tanga went out to lead his warriors against their enemy, and ever and anon the country rang with stories of his valour and endurance, and the people's love for him became almost fanatical.

"In this year of war the Wanderer came not on his usual round.

"And thus it was two years later when he appeared again, and he went straightway to the river to look for the woman—but he found her not.

"He asked some other women, saying, 'Where is she among you whose hair is dark like a raven's wing, whose eyes are like twin stars of blue, whose grace is like the willow in the wind, and whose name is a flower and a perfume.'

"And they laughed greatly at him, saying, 'Look

no farther, Wanderer, for all these things have changed. It is now two years since a madness came over her. Henceforth she is no use to you, or any man.'

"And the Wanderer's heart stood still, but he questioned them, saying, 'Of what manner of madness dost thou speak?'

"And one of the women answered him, saying, 'Canst call it aught else?—for she sold her jewels and her dresses and her gold and silver bangles and gave the money to the poor; and now she dresseth in sackcloth, and of men, even the richest and handsomest, she will have none. She hireth herself as a beater of brass to an old merchant—for very skilful she is in the beating—and she works for fourteen hours a day; and pale she is and thin, and her hands are rough and spoilt, and yet she fails to earn even a decent living. For there is a great Prince who wishes to starve her into submission, and he pays the janitor of the bazaar to manœuvre that her things remain unsold.'

"The blood rushed to the Wanderer's face, and love of her raged fiercely in his heart, and he turned to go quickly, with the intention of taking her to himself and protecting her against the world.

"But the voice of another woman arrested him, saying, 'Yea, and I have heard that to-morrow she is to be sold in the market-place. Willingly she permitteth herself to be sold by the old merchant, for she cannot make enough to live on, even though she toil night and day. But there are strangers in the town this night, who would buy skilled slaves to take back with them to their far lands, to teach their women arts.'

"The Wanderer's heart jumped for joy, and he knew what he would do when the morrow came. But in the

meanwhile he crept to the market-place, and from a spot where he could see and not be seen, he gazed upon the woman. She was kneeling to her work—hammer, hammer, hammer—and her hands were rough and swollen. And every now and then she pushed her hair back wearily, and it was easy to see that her head and back ached, and sometimes, to rest her eyes, she would gaze across the market-place for a second before continuing her work.

"The Wanderer saw that her face was very pale, the cheeks unpainted, the lips bloodless; and she looked like a weary child, so young—weary, but not unhappy. The eyes shone out with a new and steady light, larger and brighter than ever, because of the thinness of her face, and the whole of her had gained a new beauty, rare and lofty.

"And when the morrow came the market-place was crowded with many strangers and natives, for the slaves were to be sold that day. And the old, fat Prince came forth, and bid against the merchants who would carry Cyra away to teach her art to their women, and a younger Prince came forth and bid against the old, fat Prince. The people marvelled greatly, and a silence, born of wonderment, fell over the market-place, for the bidding was higher than anything they had ever known. And all the while Cyra sat apart, alone, drawing figures in the dust with her fingers, hearing nothing, caring not at all.

"And whatever price the old, fat Prince proffered the younger Prince doubled quickly, and at last the old Prince withdrew, baffled and full of rage.

"When it was over, the young Prince, dressed in purple and blue, with jewels in his head-dress, went straightway to the corner where Cyra was drawing

in the dust, and he stood before her, feeling all unworthy.

"She raised her eyes and looked at him, showing no surprise, and she said:

"'So, Wanderer, it is thou?'

"And he answered, 'It is I.'

"And she said, 'Oh, Wanderer, oft when I have thought of thee, and of thy manner of speech, and the learning that was thine, I knew that I had been a fool. That thou wert no wanderer, but rather someone of high rank, who had, perchance, mocked at me, who knows? And yet I thank thee, and count it not against thee. Thou seest me now in rags—look at my hands, swollen and black—I am a slave, belonging to a stranger—I know not who, and care not. But this I would have thee know—that I am happy, and that my thoughts of thee are always well. For of all the men I have ever known, thou art the only man who gavest me aught, asking nothing in return, the only man who raised me up, instead of trying to pull me down.'

"The Prince stepped forward, all flushed with the expectancy of great joy, and in his wild ecstasy he could think of nothing save of this woman, and that he would take her unto himself and make her his Princess; and in his emotion his words came rushing out like a torrent, and he stayed not to weigh or to consider them.

"'Woman, woman, twin-soul of mine—speak not of mocking—for how could I mock thee, loving as I love? Neither speak of belonging to a stranger, for it is I, I, Tanga, thy Prince, and how many more times thy slave, who has bought thee.'

"And the people were amazed, and no man in the market-place spoke.

" But the woman rose up off the ground, and stood before him with her head thrown back, and her eyes blazed with a hot, white light ; she looked wondrously beautiful, and her figure was as the figure of pride and scorn itself.

" ' *Thou* hast bought me ! ' she said. ' *Thou !* ' and her laugh rang out wild and fierce, and all men listened, fascinated, and no one spoke or moved, not even the Prince.

" ' *Thou*, who puttest a staff in my hand, saying, " Follow the narrow white road "—*Thou*, who dashedst the cup of red wine from my lips, giving me instead water from the crystal spring—*Thou*, who shewedst me how I might be born again—*Thou* hast bought my body like any other man.'

" She flung herself on the ground, sobbing in agony, and no man who heard her sobs could ever forget them. And she beat the ground with her fist, saying, ' God of my soul—I loved him, I loved him.'

" Agony, too, was in the face of the Prince, and he rushed towards her to pick her up in his arms, and she, divining his intention, drew a little dagger from her belt and thrust it in her bosom.

" Then the Prince lifted her up and carried her into the shade, and laid her on a silken rug ; and he drew out the dagger and tried to stanch the blood ; and he said, scarce knowing it, ' What have I done, my love, my soul ? For two long years have I waited for my bride, thinking, dreaming of no other woman—and now—now——'

" Then she opened her closed eyes and looked wonderingly at him, saying, ' Your bride—your bride? '

" And he knelt down beside her, telling her the whole story, beseeching her to live, to be his love and his wife.

"A great joy shone out of her blue eyes, and she passed her arms round his neck and drew his face down to hers, looking deep in his eyes. And she said, clearly but brokenly :

"'This time it cannot be, my beloved—this time it cannot be. But have a little patience ; others may lose each other like raindrops in the sea—but thou and I—we meet again.'

"And so saying, she died.

"And the Prince's grief was such that for many months no man saw his face. But at the end of that time the old blind King had died, and Tanga ruled in his stead. And it behoved him to put self on one side and look to the interests of his country ; and he called his Council together, naming a day.

"And lo ! when the day arrived, it chanced that the air was still and heavy, and in the middle of the day the sky grew black as night, and along the sky-line there was a rim of purple gloom, telling of impending disaster.

"And the figure of the King, robed in white, stood high and lonely against the sky, with one hand raised to speak, and the knees of the councillors shook together, for an unknown fear was upon them. And the King said :

"'My tried and trusted councillors, know ye that my wandering days are done ; from this time forth my life is dedicated to the service of my people. Yet expect no son of me, for no wife shall I now ever take. Women, henceforth, are dead to me—but listen, and I will tell ye the story—as much of it as is good for ye to hear.

"'For know that I found my bride and lost her ! She was a dancing-girl, a woman of the town—but let no man dare to think lightly of her name, for the

splendour of her soul placed her high among the elect. I put her to the test, and she passed it nobly—she went through the fires of hell and came out purified.

" ' And when the prize was mine—when I should have gone and knelt in the dust at her feet, begging humbly for my reward—I went to her swaggeringly, all flushed with victory. Though I knew that her soul had nothing in it of the courtesan, yet did I in a moment of madness forget it.

" ' I went to her with talk of barter—Gods of the Earth—I was a fool.

" ' And so I lost her—yet only for this one life. For we shall meet again—it is written so——'

" And even as he spake the temples rocked, the lightning flashed, and the roar of many waters rang in the ears, mingling with the wailing of women and children. It was as if the sea had burst furiously upon the earth, refusing any longer to be held within its bounds.

. . . . . .

" And when the great flood had come and passed, the mighty civilization of Atlantis was, to the eyes of men, as if it had never been."

CHAPTER IV

NOW when he had written this, Hext put down his pen and leant back wearily, relaxing his muscles, closing his eyes—and then, suddenly, he collapsed with his arms on the table, and his head on his arms. He had concentrated all his faculties, all his energies on the story, and now that it was finished he felt strangely tired, worn out as if by some extreme physical effort.

He knew that he hadn't the power to write another line, and a great sense of haste crept over him—like the haste of a fainting man to escape from a hot room into the fresh, cool air.

He staggered up, rang the bell, and sent an imperative message to John Orlebar.

When Orlebar arrived in answer to the summons, he found his friend strung to the highest pitch of excitement.

Without salutation or greeting, Arthur Hext waved him to one side of a table, snatched a chair and seated himself on the other side, facing. "Jack—if anything ever happens to me, I want you to be Antonia's guardian."

He looked at him eagerly, as if it were a matter for instant decision.

"Certainly, if you wish it; but—but you aren't ill, are you?"

"No—no—not ill," Hext answered feverishly;

" but excited, disturbed. I want to rest—I want to rest—but I couldn't till I had arranged with you. I shall be all right after a rest—but listen. Last evening I took Antonia to see Soko."

Orlebar made a movement of surprise and expostulation.

" Yes—I know all that—you are quite right—still, I *did*, I couldn't help it. He was very much struck with her. 'There are many stories in her eyes,' he said, 'many.' I paid him and he told me some of them."

Orlebar moved impatiently. " I must tell you at once that I think it's all absolute humbug."

" Yes—yes—I know—still, you must listen. First read this "—he gave him the document he had just penned, and Orlebar read every line of it, while Arthur Hext watched him, his long fingers working nervously.

" Well ? " he said eagerly, when the paper was put down—" well ? "

" Well," Orlebar answered calmly, looking straight at him, " I think it's a very good story ; but I can't see what it's got to do with Antonia. Arthur, you are letting these things unhinge you ; it's such twaddle, all of it. Why should that story apply to Antonia any more than any other child, or girl, or woman ? and isn't life complex enough already without dragging in all this hypothetical rubbish, which can never be proved, and which can't do any good, anyhow ? Tell me the rest to-morrow, if you will, but let me take you up to your room now. You are worn out, and bed is the only place you are fit for."

" Listen," Hext said, banging his fist on the table, and Orlebar began to be alarmed, for he saw that he was worse than he had imagined, and that, moreover, it wouldn't do to make him angry. " Listen. After

that he told of another life they both had lived apart—for she and the man never really met again. Destiny kept them divided. They passed each other like ships in the night—and once or twice they hailed in passing—only that. But this time they are to meet. So watch over Antonia, Jack, if I'm not here—please watch over her."

He leant across the table, his voice becoming oddly impressive. "And Soko told *me* that when Antonia was born, we were in some place where the land is sun-baked, the houses long and low and white, the sunsets a golden dream, and the bougainvillea, clambering everywhere, a purple riot. He told me that every morning for weeks before Antonia's birth, I passed a woman walking. She was very beautiful, strangely attractive, and she looked at me as if she needed help. One morning, he said, I didn't pass ; I listened to her story. She was a married woman. When Edith's baby was born it died, but the other woman's baby—born only a few days earlier—lived, strong and well. He said that Edith, dying, cried piteously for her baby, and that the other woman, having a reason for wishing to part with hers, sent for me. That she tempted me to take her baby and lay it in Edith's arms, saying, 'What does it matter ? Since she must die, let her die in peace and happiness.' He said he saw me take the child and lay it in Edith's arms, and Edith was happy, thinking it her own, and she kept her feeble flame of life flickering until her mother arrived from home—and then she placed the baby in her mother's arms, leaving it as her dying legacy. And in her mother's grief and despair, the thought of the living baby was the one ray of hope. He said that the woman begged me again to let Edith's mother keep the baby,

saying it would break my mother-in-law's heart to lose it——" But Orlebar had come to an end of his patience; his anxiety was very great. He wanted to see Arthur Hext to bed; he interrupted the narrative.

"Then doesn't all this teach you what twaddle Soko talks? You know there isn't a word of truth in it, is there?—Arthur—Arthur——"

But Hext had suddenly fallen sideways out of his chair, insensible.

They sent for the doctor hurriedly, but he never recovered consciousness. He had tried his heart too severely for the last time.

Orlebar felt the shock and the loss terribly, but when it was all over, when he had wound up his affairs, put the last document in order, sold the house, made arrangements for Antonia—when there was nothing left to do for his dead friend but think and remember—then the memory of his last strange evening, of the half-told story and the question which was never answered, came back with haunting distinctness.

He read the document through a dozen times; he felt sure that he recognized in it Arthur's own particular imaginative spirit. He locked it up and put it away, convinced that Soko had never said these things, that Arthur had only imagined he had said them.

He explained it all to himself to his own entire satisfaction; Arthur had been very ill—delirious—and then he tried to dismiss the matter from his thoughts.

Eventually he packed up and went to Algiers. There he made every sort of inquiry possible under the circumstances; but nothing ever came to light. He found that a very beautiful woman *had* stayed alone

with her maid in Algiers, at a villa near the Hexts', at the same time as they—Narmi—the great Italian tragedienne. He followed her up, made her acquaintance, asked her intimates particulars of her life.

"Had she ever married?"

"Never—never—never. She had, indeed, refused all offers, even the most advantageous. Lovers, yes; husband, never. Narmi could not be tied."

"Had she ever had a child?"

"*Dieu merci*, never. What would Narmi do with a child? The great Narmi—who lived only for her art?"

John Orlebar returned from his quest satisfied. Arthur Hext had been delirious—poor Arthur—the nicest fellow in the world—the best friend any man ever had.

CHAPTER V

ARTHUR HEXT had never been a business man in any sense of the word ; his ideas about money were of the very vaguest, and after his death, when John Orlebar wound up his affairs, it was found that he had been living on what he earned, and that the whole of his capital, after the house had been sold and all outstanding debts paid off, would bring to his little daughter an income of only one hundred and fifty pounds a year.

So, until she was seventeen, her guardian settled her in a tiny house in the country with her grandmother and a very excellent, highly competent governess, chosen by himself.

Nobody could have had a quieter, more uneventful life. She never saw anybody interesting, for her dear, colourless old grandmother was the last person to gather round her a bright or amusing circle of friends ; moreover, the few neighbours they possessed were of the type one reads about almost incredulously in foreign newspaper articles descriptive of England and the English. Charm, spontaneity, or imagination were almost unheard-of qualities, to be greatly mistrusted and deplored ; it was a highly religious, respectable, self-conscious, curate-loving community, dressed in " bloozes " on week-days and gowns on Sundays, looking upon men as an almost improper subject of interest or conversation, unless, indeed, they happened to be husbands or the clergy.

Amongst these people Antonia looked as surprising, as unexpected, as out-of-place as a bird of Paradise—should anyone ever chance to see one swaying about on a twig in an English lane, in the dreary month of November.

From time to time Orlebar tore himself from his busy life and went down to the country to see his ward, and every time he was ushered ceremoniously into a very forbidding early Victorian drawing-room ; every time, if the weather was cold, a match was hastily put to the handful of firing in the grate, and the paper crackled lugubriously while he waited ; every time he experienced the same shock of surprise when Antonia entered the room—Antonia with her dark hair, vivid colouring, light, rippling laughter, and fairy-like flittings to and fro.

If there had been anyone in the neighbourhood who had been different from the rest, he or she would certainly have discovered Antonia and claimed her as a kindred spirit—they could not have failed to do so—but there was no one.

Her grandmother adored her—was fascinated by her—sometimes mystified. Without intent, quite unconsciously, Antonia seemed to breathe another world, create another atmosphere, suggest to the old lady the possibility that she had many limitations. She wondered often how Edith, her Edith, quiet, homely as she was, could have had a wonderful child like this.

Antonia loved her grandmother, as any child or young girl would have loved a kind old lady who was endlessly good to her, without having any particular feeling of relationship. She knew that her grandmother's house was sombre and uninspiring, that the clothes she dressed her in were very ugly, that it was

impossible to talk to her of music because she wouldn't understand; that the Spring never did—never had—whispered things in her ear, that she had no imagination, that the shining of the sun made her feel no gayer. She didn't know how these things had come to her—since she had nothing by which to compare them—but she knew them all the same. Most people don't know their clothes are hideous till they compare them with somebody else's lovely ones—some, alas! don't know it even then—but Antonia knew it without comparison, knew it quite well.

But just as a tiny, undeveloped baby does not quarrel with its incubator, so Antonia did not think of grumbling at the dullness of her home. Never given to very deep introspection, she took things as they came—she ran wild through the woods, she picked flowers and berries, she had dogs and a pony—John Orlebar had seen to that. He thought, and quite rightly, that a lonely child should have live playthings, to tend and grow fond of. She was well and solidly educated, she read a great deal, though certainly only of the books chosen for her by the elders; she drew big, bold things in charcoal that startled her governess, she played music with a Viennese feeling, she was sweet and bright and gentle with everybody, leading a perfectly sound, healthy, wild-flower life.

Only once or twice had she caused the people round her to pause and think. Once a groom had ill-treated her dog. Antonia, usually so gentle, had blazed with anger, had spoken with a force and strength quite remarkable in a child—no one had ever forgotten it.

Another time, John Orlebar had taken her up to London to a party; there were crowds of children,

all in fancy dresses, there were crackers and confetti, a profusion of flowers and Japanese lanterns, and a gigantic Christmas tree. To Antonia, aged eight, it was a fairy dream realized.

She threw herself into the sparkle, talking, laughing, dancing. Far away, on the top of the Christmas tree, Queen of the revels, danced a fairy doll of dazzling beauty. Antonia thought her far more alluring than all the other things put together, and refusing all other gifts, made up her mind to possess her.

A tall schoolboy, aged sixteen, was busily employing his penknife to cut down the presents and distribute them. Antonia did not notice him very much, was not looking at his person ; she saw only what he was doing, watched only the gifts and their recipients. Finally he climbed a pair of steps, and cut the fairy doll from off the top. It was a dramatic moment while he stood there, holding it aloft—she never forgot it. Already, round the foot of the steps, a crowd of little girls had gathered, for Antonia had not been the only one who had decided on possessing it.

" Who is the owner of this pretty thing ? " the boy said teasingly, brandishing the fairy.

" Me," " me," " me," came a chorus of voices, Antonia's among the rest.

The boy began to descend the steps slowly, his eyes fixed on a tiny figure with flaxen curls.

Suddenly Antonia got near to him, and caught his arm. " It's mine, please," she said. But he didn't notice her very much, didn't look ; they were all crowding round, and he tried to jerk his arm away, amused at being able to tease so many small people all at once. He didn't mean to be, but he was rather rough ; he pushed harder than he intended, he hurt

Antonia's face, so near his elbow. She made a dash at him, her eyes full of tears, catching both his hands. "You've hurt my face," she said imperiously, a half-sob in her throat, "and the doll *is* mine—I haven't had any other present."

For several seconds the boy stood perfectly still, never lifting his eyes from Antonia's face; then, gradually, very slowly, without a word, he placed the doll in her arms. But Antonia had forgotten all about it, her passionate desire of a moment ago had faded away; she was looking at *him*, the doll was nothing.

The little lady with the flaxen curls came up with prompt and admirable decision and took the doll from Antonia's unresisting arms. Antonia never even noticed her—the boy and she were gazing at each other, lost in thought.

Then, suddenly, loneliness and self-consciousness came over her; she withdrew her eyes, remembered where she was, and fled to her guardian, burying her face in his clothes. The whole incident couldn't have taken more than three minutes, but John Orlebar had watched it all.

"I'se tired—I want to go home," Antonia said; indeed, she now seemed to have no other thought. So he led her away, and she left the room quite happily, never looking back at anything or anyone.

But on the journey home he questioned her gently. "Why did you first want that fairy doll so much, and then forget all about it, Antonia?" he said. But Antonia was gravely silent; only her eyes seemed to hold the answer her lips never uttered.

As child, as girl, as woman, Antonia's silences were her greatest stronghold.

But when she was eighteen, Orlebar decided to bring

her up to London to stay with him for a few weeks; he thought she needed to go about, to see things, to get a little insight into the world. She had been well educated by her very excellent governess, well and soundly grounded, but she had seen and heard *nothing* —she had never even heard anybody *talk* who was worth listening to. John Orlebar was quite right; these were all the things she needed.

He came down to fetch her away—he thought of her as a child, a baby—he had made no particular plans for receiving a young lady into his bachelor household.

But Antonia was pleased, excited, happy at the idea of going. She flung her arms round his neck and kissed him—her whole self in his arms.

Now Antonia had a very soft, warm sort of body, and, moreover, there are many ways of doing the same thing. Some girls would have made it merely impulsive —tomboyish; Antonia's way made it into a lingering, caressing, puzzlingly subtle salute, none the less puzzling because her face was so unconscious. Orlebar stayed within the circle of her arms for several seconds, and then put her gently away from him, looking at her long and steadily with new and different eyes.

He thought it over quietly while they rumbled to the station in a cab, and when they got there, he wired to his married sister to ask her to come and stay. He felt suddenly that perhaps Antonia should have a chaperon—it had never occurred to him before.

Ensconced in London, with people, interesting people, constantly in and out his really charming house, Orlebar had half expected Antonia might feel strange, shy, would perhaps retire into her shell.

He didn't know her. Antonia was never shy—never *gauche*. True, she did not talk very much—she

never in all her life became a great talker—but she listened wonderfully. There is a way of listening which, if a person possesses it, puts her straightway into the centre of conversation and attention—into the very core of the gathering—makes her more felt and seen than the person holding forth—and Antonia possessed this art to a marked degree. It is one of the most useful gifts in the world to keep silence eloquently and pleasantly; for one thing it keeps its possessor out of endless mischief, and for another it necessitates no effort. It is also extraordinarily uncommon, for *so many* women that one meets every day seem to be saying all the same bright things, at the same time, in the same bright way. It's very nice, but it's monotonous.

In Antonia's case, people found themselves talking—talking their very best—to a pair of listening eyes—for eyes *do* listen as well as ears.

Mrs. Maxwell, Orlebar's sister, came up in answer to his summons; she was a charming woman of about thirty-five—young enough to be still living warmly in the present, old enough to be ripe in experience and judgment. She was tall, graceful, distinguished-looking, with a pale face, brown eyes, and an attractive, sympathetic manner. She fell in love with Antonia at once—and Antonia responded warmly; she put Mrs. Maxwell on a pedestal, loved her, admired her, thought her an ideal woman. And in a different way Irene Maxwell idealized Antonia—sentimentalized over her, felt like a mother towards her, and was immeasurably surprised to find herself so feeling.

There are some people in this world who have something about them which makes other people want to serve them, not because they are rich or influential,

but because of something in their personality. If it is a woman, people want their friends to meet her, they want to get her invited to all the nicest parties, they strive to secure for her the best of everything.

It is quite a useful attribute, and Antonia possessed it. All her life it remained with her.

And when people had done it all for her—had secured, perhaps at particular pains, some prize to lay at her feet—she thanked them warmly, was charmingly grateful, gratifyingly delighted—but never surprised. It didn't occur to her to think that it was unusual, she took it all as her natural due and right, as a young princess takes the courtesies of her entourage. This amused Mrs. Maxwell and her brother, and delighted them not a little. John Orlebar was now a famous K.C. —one of the stars of his profession—yet, busy man as he was, one of his chief pleasures was to take his ward to see things he felt would specially appeal to her. The education of Antonia became a delightful game. He took her to see pictures, to the opera very often—she heard "Tannhäuser" and "Pagliacci" and "Faust" and "La Bohème" and many others; he took her to "Romeo and Juliet," and to see some wonderful classical dancing. Antonia was enthralled with it all; she came back and danced to them at home, while Adam Chaine sat at the piano and played Rubinstein for her with his long, weirdly flexible fingers.

Adam Chaine was an habitué of Orlebar's usually entirely bachelor apartment; he was one of the strangest characters in London. He was born an American, but it was so long ago since he put foot in that country that it didn't seem to count—it had dropped off him like a discarded mantle—there was no trace of it remaining.

He was forty-three ; nobody knew anything about his parents, nobody knew anything about him whatever, except that he was very rich, that he spent his money quietly and unostentatiously, that he had lived nearly all his life in Paris and Munich, and was a wonderful portrait painter, especially of women. But it was very seldom that he consented to paint a portrait at all—never unless the subject appealed to him particularly.

Apart from painting them, and from offering them the merest social amenities, Adam Chaine had never been known to have anything to do with women. It was understood that he admired them very much—enormously even—with the eyes of an artist—but as a man, not the least in the world.

There had been women who thought they could alter this ; they had tried—and failed ignominiously. He never spoke of his experiences with them, but they resulted in his refusing to paint any more portraits.

For the rest, he entertained a great deal in quietly luxurious fashion, was known all over the world, was enormously run after, lionized, bombarded, flattered, pursued. It never changed his strange personality in the slightest degree. As an unknown student in Paris before his successes, he had always had the same slight, cold, supercilious arrogance, and a gift for saying "no"—perhaps the most difficult word in the world to say.

He was an æsthetic, a mystic, a genius, a brilliant talker, a sullen recluse, anything, everything except a human being—he was never that—never.

He had very marked antipathies ; he disliked illness intensely—would never speak of it. One would say he had an intense contempt for everything bodily,

especially for anything bodily that was out of order. Yet it was known to a few people that he gave away large sums of money to hospitals and homes for incurables. He had two houses, one in London and one in the country, full of pictures, furniture, china, collected with great skill and knowledge. His taste was almost faultless—lofty, classical, and severe.

In appearance he was tall, strong, and burly-looking —he had a blunt nose, a small, pointed beard, and oblique eyes like a Tartar or a Chinaman. He didn't look æsthetic till one spoke to him, and then one saw that his eyes were like a fish's eyes, and his manner was extraordinarily interesting and cold. His hands, too, were wonderful — long, flexible, powerful, artistic.

Antonia took him in the same perfectly natural way she had taken everything and everybody else. She didn't seem to recognize him as a type by himself—as anything original; perhaps this was because she had never known any other men. Generally he had the effect of making people rather unnatural in their behaviour—Antonia remained uninfluenced—simply herself.

He was interested in her at once; in his cold, critical way, he thought her beautiful. He talked to her as he talked to the young men who were his disciples in art—it was quite curious.

He played for her on this particular afternoon, and watched her graceful movements.

"That's good," he said, in his quick, curt way, "but we must look up some music less hackneyed to dance to. Also your hands and arms are not bad—but your feet might be doing more."

Antonia stopped and came up to the piano: "My

clothes are so ugly—aren't they ? No one could dance in them."

" You ought to have a soul above your clothes."

" Well—I haven't. If they were nice ones I could forget them and soar—but these—no—" she shook her head.

" Yes—they're not beautiful "—he eyed them up and down—" you ought to be wearing a drapery."

" Antonia," John Orlebar chimed in, " I told you to go and get yourself some dresses—you can afford them, my dear—I am the keeper of your purse—I ought to know."

She couldn't afford them really, but as her guardian he thought he was justified in telling her she could ; he wanted to give her pleasure, and there was something about her that told him instinctively that she wouldn't take them if she thought they were a present.

" Very well," Antonia said, " I think I must. I want some very badly ; it's only because I have been so busy seeing things that I haven't done it before. Come with me—will you ? " she said, turning gravely to Chaine ; " I think you'd know what to choose."

Orlebar gave a sort of grunt ; he couldn't imagine Chaine doing any such thing. Chaine purred over by a Frenchwoman—Chaine encircled by *mannequins !*

Mrs. Maxwell looked up from her letter ; she felt perhaps the situation needed relaxing. " Shall I go with you, Antonia ? "

Antonia smiled across at her. " No, thank you, dearest ; I love your clothes, but I think Mr. Chaine knows even better what would suit me ! " It was quite true.

" Very well," Chaine said, rising and looking at his watch ; " let us go at once. I have two hours to spare."

They went out together in the most natural way in the world, Antonia utterly unconscious, Adam Chaine cold and unsmiling as ever.

It was typical of Antonia that she did not go to a mediocre dressmaker, as most people would have done, as a stepping-stone between the great *couturières* and the village bungler; she went straight to the best French house in London, walked in with an entirely grand air, and ordered lovely clothes quite unaffectedly, as if she had done it all her life.

The other two who were left behind looked at each other curiously.

"You never told me," Irene Maxwell said slowly, "the least what Antonia was like."

"I didn't know—I don't now. What *is* she like?"

Mrs. Maxwell sat down thoughtfully on the arm of a chair. "She's just a girl—really, I think she's only an ordinary girl—but she's beautiful—and so natural—she's had such a funny bringing-up. She has an odd sort of effect upon me."

"What sort of effect?"

"I don't know—it sounds silly, perhaps—but I feel frightfully sentimental over her—and—and—sort of *protective*." She smiled, half ashamed of betraying her feelings; she would have died rather than say it to another woman.

Her brother turned round in his chair. "But wouldn't you feel that for any young girl of eighteen who appealed to you?" He was visibly interested in the problem.

"Ye-es, I suppose so; but the fact remains that I never have felt it as I do for Antonia."

"Tell me what you mean, Irene. Let's have it out" —he began dragging two armchairs towards the fire

encouragingly—" I want—to talk about Antonia myself."

Mrs. Maxwell laughed. " Jack—oh, Jack—you're not in love with her ? "

She knew that in the past there had been a fire in her brother's life—one which he had kept burning brightly for a good many years—but which eventually had died away, leaving only the ashes. He laughed now—it was his turn—and leaning forward, picked up the poker, playing with it a trifle nervously.

" My dear—I am forty-seven—I am her guardian. I am getting old and I have a sense of humour. But I confess that when Antonia kisses me—which she does twice a day and which I look forward to very much—I feel that I am doing something *wrong*. Do you understand ? "

It was lightly, whimsically said, but his sister was watching his somewhat beetling eyebrows.

" I do—very well."

" Yes—well, that's all there is to tell—and all there ever will be—except—" he laughed—" will you remind her to call me ' Uncle Jack,' and not ' Jack ' or ' Mr. Orlebar '—will you ? "

" I shall remember." The two smiled at each other, and then Mrs. Maxwell turned away and drew up her chair cosily. " Let's talk," she said, putting her hand on his, " I want to unburden my soul. You know the effect a perfect piece of workmanship has on one—nature's workmanship, I mean—a wonderful rosebud, say—or a lily with the dew still on it. It would be a detestable person who could handle it disrespectfully, or pick it to bits. I suppose I'm a romantic fool, but that's what I feel about Antonia. Oh ! I express myself badly—but you know what I mean, don't you ? "

Orlebar blew rings of smoke. "I do!—it's just what I mean too."

"Yes," Irene continued meditatively, "they are all there—all the things a woman ought to be and have—they are only waiting."

"Waiting!—what for?"

"For the right man, of course—the fairy prince." He knew this was coming—it was obvious, even to himself.

"She's only eighteen—one can't think of it yet."

"Of course she's only eighteen—but she will be nineteen next month. You will never be able to keep her back—with a face like that it's bound to happen. Oh, I do hope she will get the right sort—and be happy. Wouldn't it be awful, Jack, if the bud never blossomed into a flower—if it got nipped in an early spring frost and withered and died. We must never let *that* happen."

Irene Maxwell had not been very happy herself. She looked back on her own girlhood, and hoped with all her soul that it would be different with Antonia.

"Do you think she understands anything about love?" Orlebar said abruptly, after a little pause.

"No," Irene answered slowly, "she doesn't yet; but I've watched her very carefully, and I believe there is only the thinnest veil between her and a complete understanding. It's like looking at the sun through blue gauze—do you know what I mean? Some people go along all their lives with their noses to the earth—they never *have* seen the sun—they never will. Antonia isn't like that. She has her face turned up that way all the time. You've seen her dance, Jack, you've heard her play—you know how she looks! Stupid people say these things don't count—but it's because

they don't understand. Only between Antonia's upturned face and the sun there is always the blue veil. And then, some day, somebody or something will cause that veil to be torn away—and she will be standing out there in the full blaze. I only hope that when that happens she won't be standing there alone."

There was a little pause.

"Irene," Orlebar said, "women are wonderful creatures; you've put it all into words—all I've thought myself—but if you'd given me a thousand years to think it out in, I couldn't have said it as you did then."

Irene flushed with pleasure, but, woman-like, she turned the compliment airily.

"I'm a sentimental old thing," she said, "it doesn't often happen. Antonia must have bewitched me—forget it."

She switched on the lights and rang for tea, becoming very sensible and matter-of-fact all of a sudden.

"The fairy prince must have yellow eyes," John Orlebar said thoughtfully, rising and knocking the ashes out of his pipe against the marble mantelpiece.

But his sister only looked at him as if he were wandering; she had returned to earth—her day-dreams banished.

CHAPTER VI

THE clothes they chose together, Antonia and Adam Chaine, were an unqualified success. He painted her portrait in one of the dresses, a soft, white, draped affair, with a string of pink-tinged pearls round her neck. They were *his* pearls—he had bought them one day, years before, because he liked them—he put them round her neck himself to complete the picture. He called it "The portrait of a young girl." It became famous on two continents. He said himself it was the best thing he had ever done.

The face looked out of the canvas into the world—a girl on the threshold of life—full of promise, with a soul, half child, half woman; the blue-black hair was parted down the middle and done in a classical knot at the back; the eyes were neither blue, nor green, nor grey, but a mixture of all three, with an expression in them at once dreamy and mysterious.

The small, straight Greek nose was almost parallel with the forehead, the mouth was not small, but curved and red and generous, the neck long and slender, the figure all line and grace, the hands white and slim. There was not a trace of stiffness in the picture, not a suspicion of youthful *gaucherie*—but there was pride—the finest sort of pride, which knows when it is conquered—there was reserve—reserve that could be charmed away and broken down—there was virginity and purity—but there were also richness, warmth, and colour.

"It's perfect," Mrs. Maxwell said to Chaine; "it embodies all I meant about Antonia. I was trying to explain to Jack the other day—but now you have put it on to canvas. How did you do it? How did you see all that in Antonia? How did you know it was there?"

"I don't know anything about it," Chaine said brusquely; "I haven't considered it—but I think it's a good picture."

Mrs. Maxwell drew in her breath—she felt as if she had been dashed with cold water. Was it possible that the eyes of the artist and the eyes of the man were as wide apart as the poles? Could Adam Chaine be at the same time a sort of archangel, and a mole who saw no farther than his own nose? She never knew—nobody ever knew; with this strange man it was impossible to tell.

While the portrait was being painted Chaine had discovered that Antonia herself could draw distinctly above the average. She knew nothing of anatomy, but it amused him to see the big things she attempted, and the bold way she went about encompassing them. Before either of them knew it, he was teaching her—this amused him too. He knew he was one of the greatest painters of the day, that his pictures were going to live, that there were hundreds of men and women who would go down on their knees to him for a single lesson—and this girl took it as if it were nothing at all.

Not that she took his art as if it were nothing; on the contrary, she sat at his feet, she listened with rapt attention; nothing could be more worshipful and disciple-like than her attitude. He took her to see pictures, collections of beautiful things; he opened

up his own stores to show her—old silks and embroideries, pieces of Genoese velvets, robes of Spanish monks long dead and gone, Persian rugs, precious stones that had taken his fancy.

Antonia was wildly enthusiastic; she was never tired of looking and learning, she remembered every word he said as a priest remembers his prayers. And the time drew on till she would soon be going back to the country.

One evening, after tea, they were in the studio together, Chaine seated at the piano playing Chopin in snatches, Antonia standing at an easel drawing with charcoal.

"Antonia, Antonia"—Chaine improvised the words to the music—"I'm going away—round the world—do you envy me?"

"When did you think of it?"

"Last night—I'm weary—too much London."

"Is it certain?"

"Certain."

Antonia put her piece of charcoal on the ledge of the easel and came and stood by the piano.

"How long are you going for?"

"Two years."

"Take me with you."

Adam Chaine looked at her, raised his eyebrows slightly, and went on playing, without even troubling to answer.

Suddenly, without warning, Antonia burst into a torrent of tears. "You *must* marry me, you *must*," she said passionately.

He stopped playing and watched her for a few moments, as a man watches a phenomenon—and then he went on again as if nothing had happened.

Presently Antonia restrained her sobs, dried her tears, and took her seat in a big Spanish leather armchair, leaning back with the utmost dignity and composure.

"I shall wait here for your answer," she said with a little sigh. Chaine showed no surprise or embarrassment—he played on—he seemed to be thinking.

"Have you any reason for wishing to marry me?" he said presently.

"I want to see the world—I couldn't go back to grandmamma."

"And if I say 'no'?"

"I shall commit suicide."

"Oh"—unconcernedly—as if she had announced her intention of taking to slumming.

After a little pause: "Can you imagine me married?"

"Not to anyone but me."

"Any other reason for wishing it?"

"No—I want to go with you—I want you to show me things—I want to learn—I couldn't go back to grandmother. I couldn't bear your going round the world without me—I should miss you too much."

"I see—you want to see the world—to get away from grandmother. What would be my share in the advantages?"

"I'm afraid, perhaps, there aren't any for *you*—unless—you can think of some for yourself. I'll try not to be a *disadvantage*."

He stopped playing and turned round rapidly on the music-stool. He spoke very quickly, as usual.

"I can think of *one*—I, too, want to get away from something—from myself." He hesitated. "No"—he twisted back again and resumed his playing—"Our reasons are too flimsy, Antonia—not for me, perhaps—but for you."

"No," Antonia broke in; "no—they are splendid reasons——"

"Wait!" He held up his hand. "Let me explain. I live by myself—it's dull! I don't want a man to live with—I don't want a wife. But I have sometimes thought I should like someone who was neither—who was something different—who filled a unique position created by *me*, someone, above all, who didn't bore me. Someone to travel with when I wanted a companion—to talk to when I wished to talk, to listen to when I felt silent—to *move* about in the house, to make sounds and vibrations"—he waved his hand expressively—"to create waves and currents of air. Someone who would inspire me to paint, who would be interested in my art—that's why I'm going abroad—I'm getting stale—I can't paint any more."

Antonia rose from her chair and came and leant over the end of the piano.

"All these things I would do for you," she said solemnly.

"Would you? You are a brave woman—*I* wouldn't if I were you."

"It's just what I want."

"All my life, Antonia, I've made it a rule to pay for everything—I've always paid. Do you think it's a fair exchange for escaping grandmother?"

"I've told you what I shall do if you don't marry me."

"You're talking nonsense," he said sharply.

"You will see that I am not."

He waved his hand, as much as to say, "I pay no attention to that sort of thing," and got up as if he had finished the discussion. His answer was in no way influenced by her last remark. "Very well—marry me if

you like, only you must think it over for forty-eight hours—if I were you I should decide against it. You will tell Orlebar and Mrs. Maxwell, and they will dissuade you—they will be quite right—I should take their advice."

Antonia shook her head.

"You *will* marry me—it's a promise ? "

"Oh yes, I've said so."

Antonia began gathering up her things—it was getting late. "Then we are engaged—it's a great relief to my mind."

"Forty-eight hours," Chaine replied, leaning against the mantelpiece.

"Yes—I'll think—but it will make no difference. Listen—tell me more—where shall we go ? "

"I'm beginning with Paris—then I shall wander."

"Lovely—what must *I* do ? "

"As you like, I hope—please don't become a slave—it wouldn't suit you."

"What are my duties ? "

"Duties ! What a painful thought ! "

"No duties—that unique position ? "

"No duties—for the love of Heaven."

"Just amuse myself ? "

"It's the way to be most amusing."

Antonia finished putting on her gloves and drew a deep breath. "Don't tell me any more—it has taken my breath away. I think I'm extraordinarily lucky. I must be going home now."

He rang the bell and escorted her to the studio door, where the butler was waiting to help her on with her cloak and usher her into the motor.

"Good-bye "—he shook hands—"I should take Orlebar's advice—it's sure to be sound."

CHAPTER VII

"ANTONIA is late this evening," Orlebar said to his sister. They were sitting in his very comfortable study, trying to make up their minds to go up and dress for dinner.

"Yes—I suppose Chaine is giving her a lesson. Isn't it quaint, the fancy he has taken to her?"

"Would you call it a fancy? I shouldn't think it was any such warm feeling as that. He's interested! She doesn't bore him!"

"Well, it's a fancy—for him. What a good thing it isn't any other young man—ineligible for preference. I should be worrying myself into fiddlestrings."

"Antonia has a sort of respectful adoration for Chaine—have you noticed it?"

"Yes, but what of it?—Here she is!"

Antonia appeared in the doorway. She looked glowing, elated, triumphant, frightfully excited, in a suppressed sort of way.

"Am I late?" she said. "So sorry. Oh! but you haven't gone to dress yet—that's all right. Only do come—do come! After dinner I have something to tell you—something wonderful."

They looked at each other, John and Irene. They couldn't catch her gaiety—she seemed, somehow, unnatural—it moved them unpleasantly.

They put down their respective occupations and went upstairs obediently.

After dinner, in the study again, Antonia sat down on the fender with her back to the fire ; and as the butler closed the door, disappearing with the coffee and cigarettes, she exploded her bomb.

" Adam Chaine and I are engaged to be married."

There was a pause—one could have heard the drop of an ash into the grate.

" It *can't* be true," Irene said.

" Did Mr. Chaine *ask* you to marry him, Antonia ? " John Orlebar's voice was stern and cold.

" No—I asked *him*."

The butler entered with a note. Orlebar took it, read it, and handed it to Irene. It ran as follows :

" Dear Orlebar,

" Antonia is kind enough to wish me to marry her. I have advised her to reconsider it, and she has promised to think it over for forty-eight hours. I have also advised her to take your advice, knowing what that will be. Please understand, at the same time, that I am willing to do as she wishes. If you will arrange an interview, I can better explain to you the exact situation.

" Yours very truly,

" Adam Chaine."

Irene handed the letter back to her brother ; they were both profoundly thoughtful.

" Let us discuss it," Orlebar said at last.

They *did* discuss it, far into the night—they were gentle, kind, considerate, persuasive, but very firm. It could not be ; they were quite determined about that. The disparagement in age was too great—Adam Chaine was never meant to be married—he was an artist

wedded to his art. Antonia never argued, never for a moment throughout the struggle did she show the slightest sign of weakness. "I can't go back to my old life," she kept reiterating.

"Then stay here," John Orlebar said at last, in desperation; "stay as long as you like."

"No, it couldn't be my permanent home; sooner or later I should have to go back. Besides, it isn't only that—I *must* be with Mr. Chaine—I couldn't *live* without him—he's made my life so full—so—so—interesting." Once she said: "Have you anything against him? Is there any blot on his character?"

They were bound to admit that they knew of nothing—had heard of nothing. He was merely an eccentric.

They parted that night, but with nothing decided—Antonia remained immovable. Next morning early Irene slipped on a wrapper and went into Antonia's room and sat on her bed. She held her hand and stroked it gently. She meant to try and make her understand, to realize a little what marriage ought to be, to tell her a few of her own experiences.

She found herself baffled, disconcerted at every turn. Antonia was hot and dry and feverish—she hadn't slept all night. She was impossible to do anything with; she was like a sick child.

"Did you do any good?" Orlebar said, as they met at the breakfast-table.

"None—how can one teach a person higher mathematics when they haven't learnt simple addition?"

They blamed themselves, they had a thousand regrets, they were two miserable people, they saw how easy it is to be wise—too late.

After breakfast Orlebar spoke to Antonia again; she sat looking at him with frightened eyes, but she never

gave way an inch. "I can't give him up—I can't give him up," was all she said.

They decided to refrain from speaking about it at all—to let the matter drift—to see if it wouldn't die a natural death.

Antonia herself began it again—she had no intention of letting the matter rest. "Uncle Jack, I want to marry Mr. Chaine at the end of the week, on my nineteenth birthday. He is going abroad—I must go too."

Orlebar got up and leant with his elbow on the mantelpiece. "Please understand, Antonia, that as your guardian I absolutely forbid it, if for no other reason, on the ground that you are too young."

"Then I shall *kill* myself," Antonia said slowly, with set face and white lips.

Orlebar stared; he felt that it was a very unpleasant idea, but thought it could only be the ravings of a little girl who was highly overwrought.

He sat down and wrote a note:

"DEAR CHAINE,

"The idea of my ward marrying you or anyone else at present is preposterous. I have forbidden it absolutely. Kindly refuse to hold any further communication with her on the subject.

"Yours truly,

"JOHN ORLEBAR."

He showed it to Antonia, who read it and handed it back without a word. He sealed it, rang the bell, and gave orders for its delivery.

That evening they waited in vain for Antonia to come down to dinner. They began without her; they decided she was too upset to come down. After dinner

Irene ran up to her room to see if there was anything she could do for her, any comfort she could offer; the door was locked; she tapped and got no answer. She ran down again to John. They went up together, burst open the door, and found Antonia lying there, unconscious—she had taken laudanum.

Years after, Antonia laughed and cried when she thought of it—thought of the time when she had played the rôle of tragedy queen. Fortunately she hadn't taken the right dose—she took too much, to make matters more sure—it has the same effect as taking too little. They brought her round, but only to find her as determined as ever.

Next morning Orlebar sent for Adam Chaine, and they were closeted together for a very long time.

"I merely propose a change of guardians," Chaine said, half-way through the discussion; it was the sequel to a long story he had been telling. He leant back coolly in his chair, but despite his pallor and air of indifference, there were faint signs of unusual inward emotion in his face. Orlebar, who had been listening, deeply interested, grew suddenly angry at these last words. He rapped on the table with his knuckles.

"I daresay; but do you realize that I consider my ward to be, in all probability, a girl of considerable temperament. What do you propose to do about that?"

Adam Chaine looked at him levelly with his cold, expressionless eyes. "I think she will fall in love with one man—not many men," he said slowly.

Orlebar was taken aback. "What do you know of her story?" he said quickly.

"Nothing; how can she have a story?"

Orlebar recovered himself. "True, it's only a fairy story of her father's, I'll give you to read later! But to continue: supposing that she has the temperament, I suggest—what then?"

"Many women have it."

"Quite so; but if she meets the man?" Orlebar was insistent; he was determined to press his point home.

Chaine shrugged his shoulders. "One must take some chances in this life."

Orlebar sprang to his feet; he was really angry. He paced twice up and down the room. "It's the most diabolical scheme I have ever heard of—I forbid it absolutely and once for all."

Adam Chaine sat on quietly at the table. "Very well, then, but understand that I am quit of all future responsibility."

Orlebar came up quietly and stood before him. He tapped with his forefinger on the felt cloth. "Tell me," he said, looking the other in the face, "speaking as one man to another, without prejudice, do you think she will do anything more to herself?"

"Quite candidly—I think she may try," Chaine replied, after half a minute's consideration. "But don't let me influence you; I may be wrong, and you can keep an eye on her."

Orlebar sat down again, crossing his arms on the table. He thought for several consecutive moments and then he spoke. "At least she must know all that she is in for; she must know what matrimony really means, and how fundamentally different her marriage is going to be from everyone else's."

He rose, as if putting an end to the discussion.

"No!"—Chaine's voice arrested him—"no, she must

not be told anything. If that is the only condition, then I withdraw."

"You want me to allow her to go into this blindfold? It's incredible." Orlebar's rage and contempt were very near the surface.

Suddenly Adam Chaine became aroused; he leant forward quickly. "You force me to discuss a subject which is distasteful to me, and on which you personally consider me unfitted to have an opinion. Very well, then! You shall have it, and perhaps you will acknowledge that as a student of human nature I am at least as observant as you are yourself. Your ideas are purely conventional; your methods, to my thinking, simply disgusting. You would like to take Antonia by the hand, here and now, and tell her baldly what *you* think she ought to know—*you!* It's blunt and crude to an inconceivable degree. As a matter of fact, I suppose your sister would be pressed in to do it—that's worse, much worse. Another woman should be the very last person chosen to tell a girl anything."

Orlebar was amazed. "How, then, do you suggest?" he said ironically.

"It should dawn on women," Chaine answered frigidly, "dawn—like the break of day. And if there is any telling to be done, it should be done by a man—not any man, but *the* man." He shot the words out, coldly, impersonally; he was a doctor diagnosing a case; a scientist explaining a long-discovered truth.

Orlebar's quick intelligence and fatally impartial judgment caught his idea. "Then what do you suggest?"

"This," Chaine answered. "If you yourself had the time and the opportunity, I imagine you would take her about with you, without considering that she needed

any special preparation. As I said before, a change of guardianship is all I contemplate. Antonia is marrying me expecting just that and no more. Leave her alone."

"And when she finds out, as she is bound to do before very long?"

"One must take some chances."

"What chances are *you* taking?—on your side I see none."

"Don't you? Then you haven't considered it. She could have our marriage annulled."

Orlebar's attention was arrested. "You wouldn't like that!" He was looking at Adam Chaine quizzically.

Chaine made a movement almost of disdain. "Please understand that I have shorn life of all delusions long ago; nothing can hit me very hard. But as much as I could be said to dislike anything, I suppose I should dislike having my marriage annulled—but I'm willing to chance it. I think we can take care of her between us."

Orlebar kicked the table impatiently; he was in real and pressing distress.

"How can *I* look after her while she is abroad?"

"Trust her to me—and when we get back again, you will help."

Orlebar looked away into space; he pressed his hands to his eyes, buried in thought; when he dropped them again he seemed to have made up his mind. "She has one hundred and fifty pounds a year of her own—that's all—nearly penniless, you see."

"Well!"

He went to a cupboard and drew out the packet of papers Arthur Hext had given him fourteen years before.

"I think you should read these."

Chaine read them, but not properly. He seemed to take no interest. The rest of the story, and how Arthur Hext died, Orlebar told him verbally, having no further documents to show. The only thing he omitted to tell him, as being of no importance, was the fact that he had discovered, while in Algiers, that Narmi had been there at the same time as the Hexts.

"Well!" Chaine said again.

"Do you still want to marry her?"

"It makes no difference that I can see to a contract of this description. What difference *can* it make?"

"Very good—there is nothing more to be said. You have been generous about settlements, but I dislike the whole business, as you know. However, I have said that now for the last time—for the future I shall try to make the best of it." They came out of the room together and went up to join the ladies.

"Antonia," John Orlebar said, "I have withdrawn my opposition to your marriage. Get it over as quickly as possible."

They were married three days later, in a registry office, and left immediately after for Paris.

Chaine had written Antonia a note expounding his views on the ceremony.

"My dear Antonia,

"I have read the marriage ceremony for the first time, and while admitting it to be a remarkable document, consider it unsuitable for us. I have arranged, therefore, that the marriage shall take place at the Registry Office in —— Street. Though I do not exact from you the promises the Church would have you make, my dear Antonia, still, I am

going to ask you, while you live under my roof, to try your best to keep *your* end up, as I shall mine. A comedy that is worth playing at all—is worth playing well.

"Yours ever,

"ADAM CHAINE."

Antonia cherished the note. She felt it was the first thing he had ever asked of her. She was very vague as to his meaning, but she had a general idea that he wished her comportment to be up to the mark. She determined that he should find her in no way wanting—she was all gratitude, desirous only of pleasing. She wrote him a letter in return, promising passionately to try to be in all things what he desired: and she meant what she said.

John Orlebar, too, spoke very seriously to her the night before she went away.

"Antonia," he said, "you haven't taken my advice in the past, but I wonder if you could bring yourself to think it over in the future. When you've married Adam Chaine—stick to him. If you find out later that marriage isn't all it might be, still, remember it was your own doing, and play the game. Perhaps you will meet other women who don't—be different—remain yourself. Your temptations may be even greater than theirs—don't give way to them. When you know everything—have found out everything—still—remember your promise to Adam."

Antonia was very much impressed. For the first time, his words gave her a slight, a very slight foreboding. Afterwards she remembered them word for word—remembered them with full understanding.

It was an extraordinary wedding—no one even

attempted to make it bright. Antonia's poor old grandmother had not recovered from the shock of surprise—she was all bewilderment, from her bonnet, which wouldn't stay on straight, to the umbrella she kept dropping on the floor. John Orlebar was cold and grave, Irene was trying to find the silver lining, Antonia herself was still carried away on the top wave of suppressed excitement. Adam Chaine, dressed as usual in plain, sombre, almost shabby fashion, said " I will " as if he had just been offered a cigarette.

" Jack," Irene Maxwell said that evening, as they bade each other good night, " Jack—I could weep."

That summed up the whole situation.

CHAPTER VIII

THE Chaines remained abroad for two years, and the first six months of it they spent in Paris. Adam felt well there, found a model, liked the weather and the atmosphere, became inspired—so he took an *appartement* in the Avenue Malakoff, and the weeks and months flew by. It was always like that with him—he made no plans, but drifted fitfully, according to his moods and inclinations.

He was not a person who needed time to settle down—within an hour or two of arriving in any city he seemed to be at home, to have found his circle—or rather, perhaps, it would be truer to say his circle found him.

Antonia was extraordinarily happy in Paris, enchanted with everything. She lived the life of a *jeune mariée* with exceptional advantages—riches, beauty, fame, and an indulgent husband—and, more by good luck and a surprising chain of coincidences than anything else, nobody ever found her out. Her conversation was so easy, natural, and non-committal—nobody ever guessed that she was a child who knew absolutely nothing; her entertainments were so brilliant and sought-after, the people so well chosen, the arrangements perfect, that again she got the credit for a *savoir-faire* that was certainly not hers. It was Adam's guiding hand that arranged everything. Antonia merely smiled, looked beautiful, and became the rage.

A natural *savoir-faire*, indeed, she must have had—for looking back afterwards she knew that during those months she had lived a sort of lie, played a rôle, all unconscious though it had been—the surprising part of it was that she carried it through without ever being unmasked. In Paris, too, of all places, it was doubly strange—in Paris, where the people are wonderfully subtle, and the men are wildly interested in women, in their own cynical, degenerate fashion—and where no situation seems to be too complex, unnatural, or involved to lack either credence or discovery.

The following winter found them in Rome—and in the Eternal City it was that Antonia woke up to life. Until then she had been like a person listening to sounds in a fog—looking at the world through the wrong end of a telescope.

The Chaines went out a great deal in Roman society, and amongst many other people, Antonia met Prince Radini.

Iselar Radini was not an adventurer; he was the head of one of the great families of Italy. He had, in his day, been attracted by many passing butterflies; he knew the game of man and woman—every move of it. But for some time now his name had been unconnected with anyone, he had become blasé, tired of intrigue, more interested in politics than women. And then, one evening, he met Antonia at a reception; he was struck by her beauty, puzzled by her husband, drawn by her complex air of youth and mystery and distinction, enormously attracted by her personality.

He was very handsome, for those who admire the type—a dark Italian, olive skin, black hair, brown eyes. He had perfect manners, quiet, courteous, reposeful, a slow, leisurely way of speaking that compelled atten-

tion, and in his eyes there was a look at once dreamy, satirical, and sphinx-like—as if for a thousand years he had watched the purposeless play of the puppets.

He was a very attractive man, both physically and mentally ; unconsciously he made Antonia feel that his attention was a flattery ; he amused her, she liked him, she knew that Adam liked him too.

In reality Antonia was still wrapped up in Adam ; she thought nothing at all about other men. Everything she wore, everything she studied, everything she did was inspired by him. "Would Adam like this ? Is this the sort of thing Adam admires ?" were the questions she invariably asked herself.

But Prince Radini filled up odd moments. At balls and receptions she liked to see him threading his way towards her, she looked forward to meeting him, she knew that other women would like to see as much of him as she did ; he made her enjoy herself.

One day they met by chance, riding on the Campagna. Antonia had come out late to see if she could find the hounds, Radini had done the same.

Antonia had always ridden, and Adam wished her to continue. Wherever they went, her groom and horses followed her. It was good for her health, Adam said ; health was his idol and his fetish.

Radini watched her that afternoon, noted how the shadow of her hat made her eyes look more than usually mysterious, admired her easy seat, found something original and provocative in her careless, indifferent silences. He longed to get at the real woman behind it all. For some time past this had been an ever-increasing desire with him—it had caused him sleepless nights.

He accompanied her home, helped her to dismount,

watched her as she drew off one glove, the better to button her little apron skirt around her. She stood there on the grey stone steps leading up to the great heavy door of their *appartement*, her crop in her left hand, her right hand ungloved, white, ringless.

"Good-bye," she said graciously, giving him her hand. He held it for several seconds in his own, and there flashed between them that strange electric current that is purely a matter of sex. To her it was nothing but a little fluttering—a faint sensation of naughtiness, rather pleasant and amusing—to him it was a flame, burning more steadily every second.

"Madame," he said, kissing and releasing her hand in correct Italian fashion, "I want to come and see you one day when you do not receive, so that, if you feel kind, you will have the time and opportunity to show me your beautiful apartments and the treasures that I hear you have collected—you and your husband. Will you permit me?"

Antonia smiled; she felt especially gay this evening, and especially full of life. She did not want to go in and shut the door on the world; she would have liked to go down the hill into the city, to dance and sing and laugh in a blaze of light and colour. Everybody with any spirit knows or has known what the feeling is. She wanted someone to play with, someone to share her mood. She thought of Adam, shut up in the studio with his model—Adam, who could on no account be disturbed. She looked at the watch on her wrist; four hours before dinner, an eternity to spend alone.

She looked from the watch to Radini. "Why not this afternoon? I am doing nothing. My husband is working on a picture—possibly he may join us, if anything should go badly with his work—but it is

far more probable that I shall not see him for hours. An hour and a half to change and bathe and dress—and then—what do you say ? "

" You are too good—I accept with great pleasure. In one hour and a half I shall be there."

He mounted his horse again and rode on to his own *palazzo*, and Antonia went in and yielded herself up into the capable hands of Léontine, the French maid of irreproachable references, engaged for her by Adam.

She bathed luxuriously in scented water, Léontine did her hair in a careless, artistic knot at the back of her head, and because she was pleasantly tired with a slight backache, she rejected all her fitting dresses, and put on a little pink, *négligé* affair, very pretty and *intime*.

Even the pink satin slippers that completed the toilette had only toes in which to slip the feet, the heels hanging alluringly from the tips.

Her toilet complete, she went downstairs, and surveyed disapprovingly the silver tea-service laid out ceremoniously in the great *salon*. It seemed to be unsuitable, inappropriate. She rang the bell and ordered it to be carried through another great gallery of a room into a cosy sitting-room at the end.

Satisfied that at last everything was settled to her liking, she flung herself on to a great divan, book in hand, and waited for her guest, half buried in lace and silken cushions. He came ; she heard the footman conduct him through the grand *salon* and the gallery, all dimly and mysteriously lit as they were, usher him finally into her own sitting-room at the end, closing the door behind him.

She did not rise ; she felt that her pose was probably

very attractive, as it was certainly very comfortable—she felt teasing, light-hearted, provocative—she simply looked into Radini's eyes—and laughed.

Another moment and she was in his arms. In yet another moment she had freed herself and was listening, apparently powerless, to the things he was saying—things about love and women and husbands, in a torrent of words, with a considerable display of emotion.

One or two more moments and she had flung open the door, commanding his departure. He had laughed, shrugged his shoulders, looked at her as if she were an imbecile—and departed. After that she was alone—alone, with the bandage off her eyes.

Surprise, pain, fury, mortification, resentment, shame, wonderment—the whole gamut of emotion—Antonia went through it all. Over and over again the things Radini had said came back to her with the full force of their meaning; every word, every movement became logical and crystal-clear. She sat on and on, lost in thought—it cleared up so many mysteries—she had been blind—a fool. A servant came in and announced that Adam was waiting to dine. She rose hurriedly, flew up to her room, put her hair and dress in order, and came quickly down again.

All dinner-time she sat opposite to her husband, seeing the flowers and lights through a mist, toying with the food and tasting nothing, answering his questions in a dream.

But when at last it was over, when the servants had handed coffee and liqueurs and finally departed, leaving them alone together, the need to get at the bed-rock of the matter became more than she could bear any longer to repress.

"Adam," she said slowly, across the table, "you must never ask Prince Radini to the house again; he has been trying to make love to me."

It was the first time—and the last—that Antonia ever mentioned the word "love" to Adam. It was a word he didn't admit, a sentiment whose existence he refused to consider. In conversation he had a disconcerting way of not answering a question or pursuing a theme that didn't please him—and the subject of love was one on which no man or woman had ever been able to draw a syllable from him. Few, indeed, had ever tried, instinct told them that it was not a suitable topic—but the few that did found themselves up against the blankest wall of silence and displeasure.

There was dead silence now, following Antonia's speech—and on Adam Chaine's face an expression of cold contempt.

Antonia gazed at him fascinated; she felt as if the world were tumbling in a million pieces about her ears, she blushed till she felt the heavens must open and let her in, she wondered passionately if she had been capable of saying something in very bad taste.

If Adam expected her to ameliorate the situation, to say anything more, it was a vain expectation; Antonia was at the end of her tether. Tactful as she generally was with Adam, on this occasion she found herself in an *impasse*—unable to go onwards, incapable of beating a retreat.

So they sat on and on, in a silence that seemed to Antonia the most ghastly, the most endless, the most nerve-racking she could ever know. At last, *at last*, Adam flicked the ash off the end of his cigar contemptuously, and leaning back in his chair, rested both

hands on the arms. His voice sounded as if it had been blown across an ice cavern.

"Do I understand you to say, my dear Antonia, that you have taken exception to Prince Radini? That is a pity, because I have always considered him one of my pleasantest acquaintances, and shall continue to so think him. I hope and trust in future that you will try to see my friends in a more favourable light, and to be a little more tactful in your dealings with them." He rose as he finished speaking, and opening the door for her courteously, waited for her to pass out. She went, with careless grace and head erect, but feeling, nevertheless, as if she had been cut into a thousand pieces.

"To be a little more tactful in your dealings with them"—"To be a little more tactful in your dealings with them," Antonia repeated to herself over and over again, as she went into her own apartments, rang for her maid, dismissed her for the night, and sat down, dazedly, to think it out.

As usual, as usual, Adam, in his extraordinary way, had put his finger on the spot, and she knew it; knew that none of this need have happened, if she had been less blindly ignorant.

She saw with quite unusual broadmindedness and unselfishness that it would be rather dreadful for Adam if the girl who had insisted on marrying him, spoilt his friendships, upset the even tenor of his ways, made him look ridiculous in the eyes of the world, because she could not keep the men she met in order.

Antonia had a very courageous soul; many girls would have been stunned, crushed, embittered, rendered cynical by the almost brutally callous treatment she had received that day—but she took it otherwise.

Pity of herself was a luxury she never indulged in; besides, she hadn't married Adam looking for sympathy and love and protection. Out of the ashes of her ignorance a new and changed Antonia arose. She was not a child any longer, saying the right things by chance, escaping impossible situations by a hair's breadth. She had become a young woman. She looked into the future and realized, more or less, what it held for her. Only more or less, for the personal side of love had not touched her yet.

She saw that she must look after herself, that she must exercise infinite skill and tact, that she must avoid all snares and pitfalls, but above all, she realized that should she by some unforeseen accident stumble into deep waters, then must she never again take the situation to Adam.

This, in effect, was what she had promised him.

Very early, she wrote a letter to Prince Radini, asking him to come and see her that morning. It was a masterly little piece of diplomacy, couched in terms that made it impossible for him to refuse.

She came forward to meet him when he was announced—friendly, cordial, hand outstretched—and in her manner there was a touch, just a touch, of appeal.

"It is nice of you to come. I sent for you because I wished to tell you that if fault there was yesterday, then it was mine—and also to ask you to—to forget."

Her words were very well chosen, and well said—but, as always, her eyes fought her battles for her a thousand times better than any words.

Radini was surprised. He had wondered very much why he had been sent for; he came prepared to give back thrust for thrust, the whole affair was beyond his

comprehension—but this was the last thing he had expected. For half a second he stood still, then he turned, laid the hat and stick he still held in his hands on a side-table, and came back quickly, signing her into one chair, taking another himself.

"Madame," he said, "I am yours to command, of course—you know it. But will you tell me only the why of it—and then—I shall forget—on my word of honour."

"Radini," Antonia answered thoughtfully, "you are a man of the world—I—well I, since yesterday, am a wiser woman. Is there really any necessity—between us—of an explanation?"

He nodded his head meditatively: "And yet, Madame, I do not understand—doubtless I am very slow, very stupid. 'Since yesterday,' you say—but you—you are a *married woman.*"

Antonia sprang to her feet. It was true. It was the one thing she hadn't thought of.

It was true—she was *married* to Adam—somehow she hadn't realized it like that before. And Adam—why hadn't he—why didn't he—what had he forgotten—Adam—? But Radini was watching her intently—he had seen the frightened, puzzled expression in her eyes—with marvellous intuition he had followed the gropings of her mind.

She turned and looked at him now, and in her eyes there was something entreating, something a little piteous.

All Radini's chivalry—and he had much of it—rose up within him; he came and took her hand, bending over it.

"Madame," he said gently, "as you say, between us, what need of explanations? Yesterday I blundered

very badly—I ask your pardon—you may be able to forgive me—I cannot forgive myself. But since you wish it, the matter shall be wiped out of my memory—I understand that you would have it so. I do not ask why you have no wish to punish me as I deserve —I have done with asking questions—I simply obey you—and forget."

Antonia gave him her other hand gently. "Thank you," she said; "you have been very kind, very chivalrous."

He kissed both her gloved hands lightly, and turned away, picking up his hat and gloves and stick.

"*Addio, chère madame*," he said in his ordinary quiet, leisurely manner; "on such a beautiful morning, no doubt you will soon be going out for a walk. I see you are already dressed."

"That is just what I *shall* do," Antonia said, and she smiled at him with a "thank you" in her eyes for the friendly, conventional words, as he passed through the doorway into the gallery beyond.

Later in the day she went into the studio, and stood behind Adam while he dabbed green paint with extraordinary success on to a woman's hair, turning it into sunshine.

She waited there, fiddling with the paint-brushes.

"Adam—I was wrong about Prince Radini—he is a charming person—I made a mistake in not thinking so before."

Adam stood back, looked at his canvas critically, and dabbed more paint with care and deliberation. Antonia never knew whether he had heard or not, never knew whether he realized how she had tried to make amends, but in her own mind she felt convinced he had.

This much at least she had gained : Prince Radini might have been an enemy—he was now and ever one of her most loyal friends.

From this time on life wore another aspect for Antonia—the real aspect.

She knew quite well now why she had married Adam, her actions were easy enough to trace on looking back. She had left her home at the age of eighteen, having seen nobody and done nothing. Her nature was warmer, more impressionable, more highly strung than most people's, and at the same time, curiously enough, in many ways it was broader and more even.

The life had been a very great change to her after her quiet home ; it had carried her off her feet. She had come under Chaine's peculiar influence, had been obsessed, fascinated by him, in a perfectly mental way. It wasn't surprising ; nearly all the people who came in contact with him were the same ; they all looked for an appreciative word, they all listened to him as if he were a prophet. She was *so* obsessed by him, so fascinated, that she couldn't face being left behind when he went away. She knew now exactly what it all meant, how much it counted for.

She still admired him, still believed in him, found him enormously stimulating, mentally, liked to listen to him, to go about with him, to enter into his work, to be his companion—but she had also discovered that she could never touch him on anything human.

On politics, art, poetry, music, history he was very interesting—an education in himself ; then he could be very amusing about people too ; some of his *mots* were repeated until they became almost proverbial. Of one very well-known woman he had said, " She thinks she keeps a *salon*, poor dear lady, but really

she keeps a restaurant." It was absolutely true—the saying had the success it deserved.

But sometimes Antonia wanted to talk about headaches and love and feelings and plays and dreams and nonsense and other homely, intimate things—and this was an impossibility, for the door was bolted and barred for ever and ever. The thought appalled her now and then, almost overwhelmed her. She began to feel half frightened of Adam, to wonder what he was made of. Everybody had wondered this, all these years—except Antonia. She knew now what John Orlebar and Irene had tried to make her see; she knew, too, that as she was *then* she could never have seen it. It was fate—she *had* to marry Adam; there could have been no escape.

And this love Radini had spoken of—what did Adam think of love? Had he ever thought of it? She didn't know—she realized that nobody had ever known. But from now onwards Antonia herself saw love in everything; she recognized that it was the greatest force in the world; she couldn't think how she could have been so blind before as to miss seeing it.

She saw it in a Neapolitan fisher boy, plying his oars and singing in a little green boat—a red rose tucked behind his ear. She watched him grow suddenly alert, take the rose and throw it with well-timed accuracy on to the quay—saw a girl, with an orange kerchief bound round her head, stoop, pick it up, and wave it aloft, smiling, her brown eyes aglow.

She saw it in Society and out of Society, in the lands of the sun and the lands of the snow; she saw it in its highest form and its lowest, she saw it in crowded rooms and lonely, God-forsaken places, she saw it in picturesque surroundings and surroundings frankly

sordid, she heard it calling to her powerfully in music. And always it appealed to her, touched her, won her sympathy, found a response—left her with a dream in her eyes.

Only for herself, at present, it had no special call. She liked to toy with the idea of it, but she never met the man who would do. She never even looked for him —except out of the corners of her eyes. She was fastidious, elusive, and she said very little on the subject, refusing, silently, to discuss it with anyone. At the back of it all she remembered that she had promised Adam and Orlebar to play the game ; it was a promise to keep.

Adam was good to her. He showered things upon her, not foolish, meaningless luxuries, but beautiful things, chosen with discrimination, taste, and judgment. Her time was nearly all her own, her friends were free to come and go. In return she tried to please him. He hated to be kept waiting ; she was always punctual where he was concerned ; in a thousand minor ways she played up to Adam, satisfying his whims and fancies.

Gradually Antonia became a centre of attraction, round which others circled ; wherever she went she made her own particular effect. She was a woman who could do as she liked ; she could be tired and silent and no one thought her dull. They only watched her eyes and found them starry and changeable. Men liked being with her—they didn't care what she did or said. She never had to *pretend* to be anything—people were very satisfied with her as she was. If she was not interested in, say cricket, it was permitted to her to say so without offence. She didn't even have to pretend to be beautiful—that pretence which takes

up so much time and thought—she *was* beautiful. Many women pretend they are beautiful—and with the aid of Monsieur le Coiffeur and Madame la Modiste they carry it off wonderfully well—all honour and small blame to them.

If Antonia was bored with any man, and forgot him, losing the thread of his conversation, he didn't dislike it—he would only say that there was something dreamy about her, that her spirit floated away, lost among stars and flowers. Perhaps it was true, or perhaps she really *was* bored, like anyone else, only she didn't look it. Again, sometimes she would be all sparkle—kind, friendly, bright, charming. She kept men puzzled and wondering; they never could quite understand.

This was the Antonia John Orlebar welcomed back after two years of absence—the Antonia he watched and scrutinized at first with a great anxiety.

He knew that when she went away she had been like a bunch of flowers too tightly tied with string. The flowers were all there, in their beauty, fragrance, and variety, but the tightness of the string had crushed and hidden many of them.

Now she had come back, she was still a beautiful bunch of flowers—but the string had been cut. The flowers fell naturally into place—each one displaying itself to the best advantage.

The story of the cutting of the string he would have given worlds to know; yet on this one point he satisfied himself—Antonia hadn't met anyone she cared a fig about.

CHAPTER IX

THE beautiful Mrs. Adam Chaine, after going through a season in London, became as well known, as admired and sought after there as she had been everywhere else, perhaps even more so, for Britons love a celebrity, and here was the wife of one of the greatest painters of the day—and a very curious man to boot—with an international reputation of her own for beauty and fascination.

As for Antonia herself, she was happier than she had ever been; she enjoyed England thoroughly as Adam's wife, and found that it was the only place in the world to live in. For one thing, she liked the men much better than any others, thought them better-looking and nicer. They could be trusted too; at least, they behaved to women as the women themselves wished them to behave, and that is all that really matters.

Antonia liked men much better than women, probably because she was intensely feminine. For does not the same broad principle apply the other way round? The more masculine a man is, the more interest he takes in women—it is generally only the effeminate men who don't seem to care for them. Women she liked individually—was indeed a very loyal friend to a few of them—but collectively they rather bored her.

It would have bored her, for instance, to go about in gangs, like so many women of the present day, living in each other's houses, reading each other's letters,

wearing each other's hats. It would never have occurred to her to give large female lunches at the Ritz—it wouldn't have amused her, and would also have seemed a little ridiculous. This was due, probably, to her rather foreign outlook on things social, gained by living so much abroad.

As usual, people were tremendously interested in Mrs. Chaine, as well as admiring; they were curious about her tastes, her doings, and her husband. They asked each other, "What is Mrs. Adam Chaine really like when one knows her well?"; they wanted to know how she passed her days, how much she spent on dress, how she had done up her house, who her particular friends were, if she loved her husband, if he loved her, and if not, who they each loved outside the family circle as it were?

Not that Society with a big "S" was excluded from the hospitality of the house in St. James's Square. On the contrary, the doors were thrown open quite often, and they all flocked in, to be entertained at balls, dinners, concerts, and the like. But beyond being received by Antonia, and noticing her beauty, they knew no more of Mrs. Adam Chaine after seeing her about a great deal than they did before.

This was because she had only a few really intimate friends, two or three women and more men, and they were very well chosen intimates, loyal and silent. They seemed to join hands in a circle, with Antonia as the centre, and very little gossip about her filtered through them to the outside world.

But because where people are interested enough they are bound to find out something, a certain amount of information of no particular importance became known, and was bandied about from one to another.

"People said" that in spite of Mrs. Chaine's quiet way it would be a mistake to think she was ever shy; she was absolutely self-possessed and assured, and generally quietly got the better of anybody who forced her to cross swords.

They said that she never said *risqué* things, and seemed to dislike *risqué* stories.

"The women" remarked that it was one of her characteristics rarely to praise another woman—the men, of course, never noticed this little foible. It was quite true that she never rushed about raving over other women's charms in the good-natured way many people do!

But, on the other hand, everyone was agreed, that if she never praised, she never blamed, never criticized or said disagreeable things, or took anyone's character away. She seemed to dislike scandal, listened to it if there was no escape, with an air of fastidious distaste, and changed the subject as soon as possible. She made a habit of lazily defending those who were being run down, and refused to cast a shadow of doubt over any woman's morals. "How can you be so unkind?" she would say. "Life would be impossible if one always thought those things. I don't believe it."

Although she didn't care much for women it seemed that she had a kind of unconscious *esprit de corps*. In her quiet way she held very lofty views for herself and her sex, taking it that the first principle is to keep silence on their shortcomings, and never to admit any moral failures. Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad thing if more women held the same views, although it might rob conversation of half its piquancy.

Again, the women had it that Mrs. Chaine could by no means be the innocent she looked; on the

contrary, they believed her to be very intelligent, for she never gave herself away in the slightest degree, or imparted any information of importance about her own affairs.

"And that takes a bit of doing," an amusing contemporary remarked to a friend. "We all explain ourselves too much in this world, my dear, give ourselves away without meaning it, to people who are not our friends. Some of us boast and vaunt and assert ourselves, others of us again crab ourselves quite unnecessarily, belittling our own looks and character and accomplishments. I'm sure Mrs. Chaine would dislike doing one as much as the other, so she keeps a golden silence. She's a very wise woman."

"Silence is the wisdom of fools," her friend replied.

"Perhaps—but I don't think so."

Now all this might have been a little dull and conventional if Antonia hadn't been a person of surprises. But quiet as she seemed to be, one always felt there was an undercurrent; she was never afraid to act on an impulse, and would sometimes do things, not indiscreet, but daring.

It was common talk how once, at a regimental point-to-point, Mrs. Chaine had burst into tears because Freddy Ramsden, a great friend of hers, had fallen and injured himself badly. She had waited for the doctor's verdict with unconcealed anxiety and impatience, and when she heard that he had probably injured himself for life, she never attempted to restrain her emotion.

"Hadn't you better try and control yourself?" some woman had said to her; "people will think you are in love with him."

"I don't care what they think," Antonia said, be-

tween her sobs. " I'm thinking of Freddy. He's only a boy, and so full of life. It can't be true, it can't."

Eventually someone put her into her motor, sobbing still, and took her home.

But it did Freddy Ramsden good, and helped him in plenty of tight places—the thought that a woman like Antonia, whom he adored, had wept over him when he was so ill, and kissed him for joy when he was going to get better. What *he* felt about her, and what others felt, was that she was a woman, a real woman, first, and all the other things after. She was very much in the world and of the world, she liked it, was born to it, and gifted with qualities that made her a success—but she wasn't a machine. This gave her a turn of originality, made of her a character apart, for really, half the people much in the world do become terribly machine-like in their acts and utterances.

As a final summing-up, " People " decided that Mrs. Chaine was not in love with anyone, that she was rather a cold woman by nature, admitting at the same time that she had a face of infinite possibilities.

Antonia would have been amused and rather angry if she had even faintly guessed at the interest the outside world took in her doings.

After the season was over she went up to Scotland, which she loved, and in the autumn and winter Adam acceded to her very ardently expressed wishes and let her hunt in the shires. She was not a great thruster, but as a child she had always ridden, and she went to hounds very nicely, enough to thoroughly amuse herself.

In the spring Adam made plans to visit Germany, electing to go alone, so Antonia decided to accept various invitations on the Continent, one to a villa

on the Riviera, where she and her greatest friend, Lady Susan Wing, were going together, to be followed up by a three weeks' yachting cruise round about Sicily.

They were a very pleasant party at the villa—the host an Austrian with an American wife, Susan Wing, Antonia, Vera Rhodes, a pretty girl who had just come out, and various men of varied nationalities continually coming and going. Antonia was thoroughly happy and content—she loved the sun and the life of sitting about among flowers, doing nothing in particular while the hours flew by with astonishing rapidity.

Just before lunch one day, they all sauntered down to the shady piazza at the bottom of the garden, wistaria and rambler roses climbing the wooden arches over their heads, and stood there a few minutes watching the movement on the white road below, and the infinitely greater, ever restless movement of the blue sea beyond. Antonia, chatting gaily, suddenly found herself losing the thread of conversation, while her eyes fixed themselves upon the figure of an Englishman who strolled out in leisurely fashion from the garden of the next-door villa, summoned a dark red Mercédès limousin from the corner of the road, got in, and drove away. He was dressed in a dark blue serge suit, a soft, turned-down collar of striped material, a little bow tie and a grey squash hat.

Without making any special effort, Antonia found herself trying to get a glimpse of his face, and failing—but it was more with a view to verifying her own impression of what he was like than making a new discovery. She had a curious sensation that though she couldn't call the face up before her at will, though it was more or less a blur in her memory, yet that she

knew very well what it was like, and that the actual sight of it would be nothing but a corroboration.

It was much later in the day that Lady Susan and she went for a long drive along the coast in a neat victoria, behind a pair of their host's fat, sleek, chocolate-fed-looking horses. At a far turn, from whence they could see the road winding on ahead of them for two or three kilometres, now concealed, now in view, Antonia espied, coming towards them in the distance, a gradually rising cloud of dust that seemed to have something lurid, something fateful and significant about it. In the centre of it all, the cause of the commotion, a familiar dark red object was hurtling itself over the bumpy Italian road, with what looked like an alternate crouch and spring and bound. She found herself watching intently.

It came by their ambling carriage pretty fast—but not so fast that Antonia failed to catch a glimpse of a man seated inside, dressed in blue serge with a striped collar. He was sitting up rather straight, as people do sometimes when the exigencies of the moment call them to sudden order and a suitable deportment. With the tail of her eye, at the last possible fraction of a moment, ere the red car had completely passed, Antonia saw something she was not meant to see. It was a hat with a wreath of roses round it! The owner of the hat was leaning against the man, tucked as it were within his arm, lower even than his shoulder—a novel in a nutshell.

Later, having tea with Susan Wing and some friends in the hall of the hotel, Antonia saw the red Mercédès drive up again and the Englishman step out—alone. She found herself being ridiculous enough to be surprised at his looking so indifferent and unruffled—as if

nice people ever carry their emotions written on their faces or in a disordered dress.

The hat—the other hat with the wreath of roses—had gone back to its own band-box elsewhere. Antonia would have been surprised if she had heard the farewell the Englishman had given it.

"Good-bye," he had said laconically, "I shall come and see you off to-morrow. I'm not at all sure that I'm glad you came, Daisy."

"Why?"

"Because you have been so walled-in by relations. We've had nothing but these drives—they're a mistake—unsatisfactory."

His tone was cold and lackadaisical—he was evidently not a believer in that school of modern thought which teaches that when one wants a thing and doesn't get it, one has really lost nothing, but rather gained an added force.

The woman called Daisy shrugged her shoulders slightly and laughed: "Oh, well! you only had two days of me. I can't think it has upset you very much. Good-bye." Strangely enough, she didn't seem to resent his words or his tone, but chose rather to handle him with a very light touch. She minded; it hurt—but wild horses wouldn't have dragged that admission out of her—besides, she had always known he didn't really care, and there were other things to remember in their intercourse which more than outweighed in her eyes a few bad moments like these.

As the Englishman passed through the hall of the hotel he paused a moment to read the telegrams posted on the board, turned suddenly and unexpectedly, as if pulled by an invisible string, looked in Antonia's eyes for half a second, and passed on up the stairs.

But in that moment Antonia knew that she had not been mistaken ; he was the boy who, years and years ago, she had last seen slowly descending the steps near a Christmas tree, a fairy doll in his hands. All those years ago she had been startled, because she had imagined him to be the Tomaki of her baby days, but now she couldn't tell if he really had been like Tomaki or not, for Tomaki's personality eluded her memory—she only knew that the boy had grown into a man, and had just passed before her up the stairs.

She calculated his age ; if he was about sixteen when she was seven, now that she was twenty-two, he must be about thirty-one. She wondered what he had been doing all these years. He looked as if he had lived a very full man's life, in a quick, vivid sort of way, and had no time for aimless wanderings.

His appearance, like that of most men with no outstanding features and nothing remarkable about them, was very difficult to describe. He was just a little taller, a trifle cleaner cut, a shade or two better-looking than most. His hair was darkish, his face clean-shaven, his eyes a light tawny sort of colour ; and while they usually held a rather cold, critical expression, they sometimes smiled, half cynically and half humorously—and a smile in the eyes is always attractive.

To an observer of human nature his eyes gave a key to his character. He was not affectionate, but he was understanding. It was in him, probably, to be passionately devoted to a person, but not fond. He didn't go through life being fond of this person, or that, or the other. He *liked* people—numbers of people—but he didn't squeeze their hands a tiny bit, link his arm through theirs, give them little kisses. He wasn't affectionate enough. There are lots of men who do,

and sometimes they get confused, and mix up fondness with love—this man escaped these dangers, even if he fell into others. He was very understanding of human nature, and oddly sympathetic to his friends, but this understanding, endearing as it was, seemed to be arrived at more by the clear thinking of a rather wise head than the warm beatings of an affectionate heart. He had an indescribable something which made one think he was in the Army, or had been, and he possessed to quite a marked degree the well-bred Englishman's characteristic—a self-assurance that is almost insolent, yet somehow without a touch of swagger.

Antonia found herself wondering how much the wreath of roses counted in his life, but after all, as she knew well, it doesn't do to think seriously of little episodes without knowing more. They may be of great importance, they may be of none. She thought what she *wanted* to think, as women always do, and clung to the latter supposition.

She wished to meet this Englishman, to know who he was; she felt sure that one day it would inevitably happen, and that when it did they would discover a special sympathy between them.

How often in life people recognize their friends across the road as it were. "That man or woman would be my friend," they say, "if we ever chanced to meet." Sometimes it happens that they have to acknowledge themselves mistaken, but perhaps, when this occurs, it is not so much an error of instinct and judgment, as that the exigencies of modern life, the hurry and bustle and competition, have combined to prevent a good understanding.

Perhaps this is what Antonia forgot or failed to take into account, when she felt so sure that her meeting

with the Englishman, when it happened, would be more like the recognition of two people who were already friends.

It was the day after Antonia Chaine had seen the red Mercédès that a very nice and charming, cheery boy called Dick Venour came up to lunch at the villa; he was most anxious that Susan Wing, Antonia, and Vera Rhodes should dine with him at the hotel that evening, and stay to the dance after, adding, by way of inducement, that they would be a little party of six, quite independent of other people.

Antonia, for some unknown reason, faintly urged the acceptance of Dick's invitation; she *said* it was because Vera evidently wanted so much to go. It was true that Antonia was very kind to girls, and liked to help them to enjoy themselves.

As things turned out, Dick rather bungled the party; he secured Peter Grey, a charming person who wrote divine waltzes, which he danced equally divinely, but he failed, through some unlucky chain of circumstances, to get a third man, so that they finally sat down to dinner three women and two men.

"Mrs. Chaine, I'm so sorry," Dick said; "I'm sure you will think me a very bad host and a hopeless muddler."

"Nonsense—Susan and I will both talk to you at once—we shall love it," Antonia said, laughing. It was rather odd that it was Antonia's displeasure, and not Susan Wing's, that Dick seemed to fear; it must have been that, in spite of her quiet way, Antonia had something about her that made people feel things had to be very much up to the mark, whereas Susan was a much homelier sort of person, who never minded anything.

As a matter of fact, Antonia did think that Dick had managed badly ; she had all the punctiliousness of a foreigner for these matters. She herself would never have dreamt of giving a dinner, however small or impromptu, with the number of women predominating. But it was Dick's responsibility, not hers, and he was so young and such a dear she didn't like him to feel upset, so assured him charmingly that they were all perfectly happy, and that it didn't matter in the least, as, indeed, it really didn't.

Meanwhile, a man who sat at a table by himself, far away, almost concealed behind a palm, unobserved but observing, had seen them all come in. He had scrutinized them idly, one after the other, but from where he sat he watched Antonia. There was nothing uncommon in this, people always watched her ; she was a pleasure to the eye, an attractive bit of colour. He could see her face, the contour, the eyes, the sweep of fine black hair ; could amuse himself by noting that there was something individual in the way she did her hair and wore her clothes.

Unlike most Englishmen, he understood what it was for a woman to be *chic ;* he rather loved women's things, found them fascinating, recognized the art there is in the proper wearing of a jewel, appreciated the personal note in the manipulation of a fan. On broad lines he thought that if a woman had lovely things and a charming house she must be nice, and if she had ugly, stuffy things she couldn't be at all attractive.

He was in an odd mood that night, captious and critical, not in a mood for admiring anyone or anything —still he watched Antonia's face, grudgingly, in spite of himself.

" Hullo ! " Peter Grey said, just at the end of dinner,

as coffee and liqueurs were being served, "there's Raby!"

His voice was as the voice of one who has discovered a friend.

"Where?" said Dick eagerly.

"There."

Antonia glanced across carelessly in the direction indicated—and her indifference dropped from her.

"Raby who?" she said quietly.

"Raby Stigand; don't you know him?"

Antonia made no answer, no comment.

"That's splendid," Dick went on; "I'll get hold of Raby after, and we shall be six for dancing after all."

They all seemed very pleased, Antonia thought; Raby Stigand, whoever he was, seemed to have a niche of his own high up in their approval and regard.

He left his table presently, and went out by the far door, and a few minutes later their own party rose also, and passed into the hall, which had been cleared for dancing, the chairs and tables pushed back in a ring.

Antonia had never been to an hotel dance before; it wasn't the sort of thing that Adam cared anything about; she took in the surroundings at a glance while she sat down on a sofa with Susan Wing and began pulling on her gloves.

She saw that Raby Stigand was talking absorbedly to a rather stately-looking, grey-haired Frenchwoman, old enough to be his mother—he evidently liked her, and was exerting himself—Peter and Vera had already found a corner, Dick was threading his way towards Raby with a view to bringing him up for introduction. Antonia wondered idly whether, when they danced, she should tell him about the Christmas-tree; it would

be amusing to find out first if he had any recollection of it all. She saw Raby look up, recognize Dick, smile a welcome, and leave the grey-haired lady. She saw Dick and him beginning to converse—after that she turned away and talked to Susan, waiting with a sort of suppressed sense of pleasurable anticipation.

"How goes the polo?" Dick was saying.

"Pretty well," Stigand answered; "I think we've got a very good chance for the International Cup to-morrow."

They talked polo for a few minutes; Dick was longing to ask Raby to come and join his party, but he felt he had to go warily. He was much the younger man of the two, he had a great respect for Raby Stigand, but knew him to be rather whimsical and capricious about what he would or would not do, especially as regards women. If he had asked him straight out to come and dance, he felt that Raby was very liable to refuse in just as point-blank a fashion.

"Who is that dark woman talking to Lady Susan Wing?" Raby said suddenly, but his voice sounded listless, as if it was only of the faintest possible interest.

"That's Mrs. Adam Chaine."

Dick had been waiting for a loophole—here it was to his hand. "I say, Raby, I want you to come and be introduced to my party, will you? We are here a man short, so do come and dance with the ladies."

"Mrs. Adam Chaine," Raby was saying to himself, "so that's she." He had heard of her often, heard of her beauty and successes, had seen her name in the papers a dozen times without wishing to. There was something about a really fashionable woman that roused his fighting spirit, he told himself that night. Perhaps he wasn't well enough acquainted with his

own character to know that in reality he took no interest in the buttercup and daisy type of woman—he liked the rose, the orchid, the lily and carnation. But to-night he was captious enough to cavil at anything.

Doubtless Mrs. Chaine, in spite of the soul in her eyes, was in reality fearfully wrapped up in herself, and apt to imagine that everyone was in love with her. He had meant to dine alone this evening—alone with the world shut out ; from the beginning he had rather resented it when he had seen a party of well-known English people filing across the floor of the restaurant.

Raby Stigand was of the type that is peculiarly susceptible to woman's charm while at the same time blank and impervious to her blandishments—rather after the manner of an Eastern. He couldn't help watching the creature and appraising her points, even while he smiled with a shade of tolerant scorn, and imagined that he saw through her.

This particular night he had planned to go to bed early, so that he would be in good form for the match to-morrow ; polo monopolized all his energies ; he had none to waste on anything else. Because he really liked women rather particularly, he forswore them altogether on these occasions—they were only a possible temptation—rather as a man with too great an appreciation of the vine takes the blue ribbon. In weak, self-indulgent characters, a special fondness for anything soon leads to foolishness and excess ; in stronger, more self-reliant characters, like Raby's, it means a tight hold on self, and an extra severity and wakefulness, often misunderstood and misinterpreted.

Physical fitness Raby looked upon as a sacred duty ; he was absolutely in perfect health, hard, every muscle taut, his nerve like iron. Yet, even so, his idea was

that in every man, however fit, there is only a certain amount of force, with, in addition, a reserve of strength kept in hand, to be drawn upon under certain pressing conditions of work or sport—no social pleasure under the sun being accounted worthy of the sacrifice, least of all ball-dancing. He wanted to know this woman with the dark hair because she was beautiful; he was a man with an enormous acquaintance, who made a point of knowing all the beautiful women who came his way, from a geisha to a maid of honour; but, on the other hand, it was ridiculous to lose sleep, and handicap oneself in any way with a big match in prospect, just in order to dance about with a woman, however lovely she might be.

When he was younger he had given way to these impulses too often, had made a pretty good ass of himself quite frequently, but now he only relaxed in slack moments, when there was no reason why he shouldn't.

Somewhere in the back of his mind, a thing unspoken of, he dreamt of meeting a woman for whom it would be worth while giving up everything—but that was to be "some day" in the vague, shadowy halls of fate and the future, where footsteps never echo. He would suddenly find her beside him, would turn and look in her eyes and say, "So it's you." He thought it would be as simple as that.

Behind his curious yellow eyes an amount of thinking and dreaming and observation went on that would have surprised most people—generally about sport and soldiering it must be confessed; but he had also found time to think out an ideal of love. However, this was very far from his mood for the moment.

"Thanks very much," he said in offhand fashion, in answer to Dick's appeal, "any other night I should

have been delighted, but to-night I am too tired to dance with anyone. I am turning in, in a few minutes. What luck have you had at the Casino ? " Dick was discouraged, but he was not going to give it up without another attempt.

" Come over and have a chat then," he said, turning away, " you can slip off when you like."

" Thanks—not to-night," Raby said shortly, turning in the opposite direction. He also, like Adam, understood the art of saying " no."

" Mrs. Chaine, will you dance ? " Dick said quietly, and Antonia, looking up, found him standing before her—alone.

She half rose. " Yes—but—but I don't like to leave Susan sitting here."

" What nonsense ! " Susan broke in. " My dear, I'm here to chaperon and to watch. It amuses me to see you dance, please go on."

Antonia was still hesitating.

" I shall really be cross if you don't," Susan added.

" Very well," Antonia said doubtfully, and yielded herself up to Dick's arms.

" Dicky dear," she said presently in his ear, when they were waltzing for the second time round the room, " why didn't you introduce Mr.—Mr. Stigand, is it ? to Susan; then we shouldn't have had to leave her alone ? "

" Because—because— " Dick began to answer stammeringly ; he was a truthful person by nature, but this time he wanted to tell a lie and couldn't think of one. " Because—well, the fact is, I asked Stigand, and he said he was very sorry, but he was too tired to dance with anyone to-night. He's keeping himself fit for the polo to-morrow ; he's fearfully keen, you know, and is going to bed early."

Poor Dick ! He had been very reluctant to say this to Mrs. Chaine, the beautiful Mrs. Chaine, who was accustomed to being fêted and caressed, and who, doubtless, like all other spoilt beauties, had a great idea of what was her due and right.

He had meant the evening to be such a success, and first he had bungled the dinner, and now he was obliged to admit that another man had refused to be introduced to the party. It was very unlucky—he felt that the whole thing had been rather a fiasco.

But by the time he had finished speaking Mrs. Chaine's thoughts seemed to have lighted like a butterfly on some other topic ; Dick was relieved and rather amazed to find that she didn't seem even to have heard what he said—he would have been less happy if he could have read her thoughts.

" How *dare* he ? How *dare* he be so insolent ? " she was saying to herself.

To put the finishing touch to a disastrous evening, when the time came for Antonia to remain alone while Susan danced, Raby Stigand was still sitting there, engrossed in the newspaper, not yet having transported himself to bed. Moreover, he seemed to generate an atmosphere of insolent indifference and self-sufficiency, hateful and intolerable to behold—or so it seemed to Antonia's inflamed vision.

It added fuel to the fire, outrage to injury, although, to do him justice, he had no idea that Dick Venour had even mentioned his name to the ladies one way or another.

A week later Antonia and Susan Wing went on to join the Baronne Claude Duval's yacht at Civita Vecchia, *en route* for a cruise round Naples and Sicily.

Baroness Claude had a sad little story, though

sadness and gloom were chased firmly away from the atmosphere that surrounded her. She had been unhappily married, had never had any children to compensate, and for the last six years had been paralysed in her lower limbs.

But despite all this, she had countless friends ; she was a woman eminently fitted for friendships. She had plenty of time for them for one thing, time to write letters and make inquiries and remember birthdays and do the hundred and one necessary things to keep in touch with the number of people who came her way. Besides, she was kind and brave and witty and sympathetic—many people were devoted to her, Antonia amongst others.

Her yacht was her great solace and delight ; she felt she could give a great deal of pleasure with it, see more of her friends than elsewhere, and be less at a disadvantage herself, for there was very little her guests could do on board in which she could not join.

She loved being carried up on deck in the morning, loved the fresh air and sunshine and smell of sea-water ; she loved the amenities of the daily life, the talks at lunch and dinner, the bridge-playing at night. Her yacht was wonderfully arranged, she was very proud of it ; it was almost like the daintiest of charming French country villas—afloat. There were no silks and satins to feel stuffy and get faded by the sun and the sea air ; the *salon* walls were covered with a charming grey-striped cotton rep—sofas with delicious filet—lace coverlets, and masses of downy cushions, all lace and embroidery, were placed about. There were niches in the wall filled with china, one or two tables of useful knick-knacks—paper-cutters, bonbonnières filled with chocolates and peppermint creams, cigarette-boxes,

cards, puzzles, books. There were great tubs and bowls and vases of flowers; indeed, the flowers were one of the great features of the room. And everywhere the things were nailed and wired down, but so skilfully that no one could imagine it till they tried to lift them. Even the china in the niches had the most natural look in the world, the imprisoning wires carefully hidden underneath, while the nailed-down vases were daily emptied of water and re-filled by means of a pump. There was a bad-weather dining-room, and a fine-weather dining-room, on the top deck, open all round, where the party breakfasted and lunched and dined almost in the open air! For every cabin there was a fitted bathroom; indeed, there was no detail in any way practical that the little Baroness had failed to think out.

On this occasion the party on board consisted of a French marquis and a French Minister, a Russian prince, an English couple, an American couple, Antonia, Susan Wing, one Englishman present, and another expected. It seemed that the latter had missed his train from Paris, and could not arrive for twelve hours, and that the party had to wait for him at Civita Vecchia, instead of moving on immediately to Naples as they had intended.

"Who is it, Félice?" Antonia asked; "anyone I know?"—and even while she asked, before the words had fallen from Madame Duval's lips, the conviction came to her that it was Raby Stigand.

"How like him," she said to herself with a little curl of her lip, "to delay the whole party twenty-four hours."

During the day she gathered from various scraps of conversation that nearly everybody seemed to have

a soft spot for Stigand, that he was one of those people who can do no wrong, who are privileged and smiled upon and allowed their own way. It irritated her quite considerably.

She discovered that he was a "Stigand of Mullions," and to be a "Stigand of Mullions" meant that his family had lived in the place long enough to justify them in feeling proud of it, and that in the past his ancestors had refused many times to be ennobled, preferring to be what they were to anything a capricious Government or monarch could make them. Apart from all that, for which he was not responsible, it seemed that Raby Stigand was now the present owner of "Mullions," although he could not afford to live there. The place was shut up, and he had gone into the service and joined a cavalry regiment, where he was very popular and one of the shining lights, and everybody had regretted it very much when he sent in his papers, giving as his reason that he wanted time to travel and see the world. Since then he had tramped through several European countries on foot, saying that it was the only way to see a country as it really is, and not as it is laid out for the globe-trotter. He had been attached as special war correspondent in every "scrap" he could get out to, had been through the Russo-Japanese war. Besides this, it would appear that he had a way of departing for British East Africa, Uganda, Abyssinia, Asia Minor, and all those out-of-the-way places, and of turning up again a few months later looking exactly the same, not a bit more savage and hardly more sunburnt, while his manner certainly never conveyed the idea of the eager barbarian, rejoicing to be at home again, but rather of the man who, at his club in St. James's Street, had tapped the

barometer, both social and temperamental, every day for the last six months.

They were having tea on the yacht when he arrived ; Antonia watched him covertly from under a large, shady hat. She heard him make his easy apologies quite unabashed, saw him talking to the little Baroness as if she were the only woman in the world, noticed how tactfully he anticipated all her wants, putting things within easy reach of her hand, helping her to feel less helpless.

Antonia seemed to find it a simple matter to interpret his feelings ; she guessed that though he wasn't fond of most people, he had a soft spot in his heart for Félice Duval, because of her wit and her sorrows and her pluck. She was quite right in her surmises.

Among the debris of "tea" she couldn't help acknowledging to herself that he was neat and deft ; although quite tall, a shade over six feet, he scarcely looked it. His head was fairly small and well put on, his feet and hands slim and not too big ; he was of the greyhound, lean type of Englishman, made of steel and iron, rather than of the burly species, all muscle and beefsteak. He manœuvred his way between deck-chairs and tea-tables, cups, cake-plates, and whisky-glasses with particular ease and skill—one couldn't imagine him doing a *clumsy* thing, like stepping on a dress, or upsetting a cup, or brushing a lady's hat in passing. More than ever, such qualities as he possessed annoyed her.

But when they were finally introduced, she smiled charmingly and gave him a slim white hand ; it would seem that Mrs. Chaine was very well pleased to meet Raby Stigand—there was nothing crude about Antonia !

He went down to his cabin to dress, thinking of her. He had recognized her at once; he felt glad he had come, he thought he was going to enjoy himself.

That night at dinner Antonia, sitting opposite to him, was in a silent mood—not stupidly silent, but listening. He noticed that she listened with a kind of curious concentration, punctuated by perfectly relevant replies, yet he could almost swear that her thoughts had floated off like a curl of smoke, lost in space. Was it a trick, or was it really so?—he began to find himself puzzling. She had quite peculiarly dreamy eyes, half hidden at times by eyelashes that somehow had a suspicion of naughtiness, the contrast of which fascinated him; so did the regular rise and fall of her white chest when she breathed. He couldn't notice it on any of the other women, they didn't give themselves time, they were so animated, so quick with repartee, so vivacious in their gestures. Mrs. Chaine seemed so cool and calm, so—apart, and as far as he himself was concerned, he might have been a bread pill lying on the table-cloth for all the consciousness she showed of his presence.

She gave him very powerfully the impression she had often conveyed to others—that her spirit wandered away on some quest of its own, far into the blue of the night, lost in a trail of stars. He thought it was a face of dreams, a face to dream about.

The men on either side of her were each talking to her busily in turns—they lost no opportunity of making themselves pleasant. Raby began to wonder what they were saying—he found himself trying to hear and not being able to catch it. He felt sure they were making love to her as far as they dared, and began to dislike the idea of it.

Sometimes she made a remark in a low, clear voice, in answer to something one of them had said; all through dinner Raby heard every word she uttered, even though he was busily engaged in conversing with his own neighbours.

Not one of her remarks was of the slightest importance; he said to himself that evidently she was not the least amusing, but it wouldn't do—it didn't seem to belittle her in the slightest degree, for it didn't really matter what she said, because of the way she looked. "If the woman was deaf and dumb, I can understand men wanting her," he said to himself at last.

When dinner was over they all went up on deck and placed themselves in long deck-chairs, cosily tucked in with rugs and furs. Somehow it chanced that Antonia and Raby were in different groups, he couldn't get near her. He didn't try very much—there was always to-morrow—on a yacht there could be no escape.

But the morrow and the day after it seemed to be the same—Mrs. Chaine and he exchanged "good mornings," he watched her at meals without seeming to, and in between-times always found her on the opposite side of the deck to himself, or surrounded by people. He began to wonder if it was done on purpose, and then dismissed the idea as foolish and arrogant. He couldn't flatter himself that Mrs. Chaine took any interest in him, either to like or dislike. There were other pretty women on the yacht; he talked to them, but he thought of Antonia.

"It's like falling in love with somebody on the stage, and just as ridiculous," he said to himself. "I only watch her from a distance, and hear what she is saying to somebody else. I must get to know her and destroy the illusion." He began to wonder things about her,

wondered about her husband, how much he counted in her life, what sort of person he was.

By judicious questioning he found out a good deal about Adam—Lady Susan told him her own beliefs. He couldn't credit them, however, couldn't believe that any man would be such a fool married to a woman as beautiful as Antonia. It made her doubly romantic though, if that were possible.

He could never pass her cabin now without being conscious of it; if the door was shut when he passed he wondered if she were dressing, or undressing, or in bed; if the door was open he never looked in—because he wanted to so badly.

After four days of it he made up his mind that on the morrow he would sit beside her somehow.

The fifth night was very hot and thundery; after everybody had turned in Antonia felt rather faint, couldn't sleep, had a bad headache. She rang the bell which communicated with Léontine's cabin, and summoned her to her assistance. Léontine suggested that she should wrap up and go on deck for a breath of air. Antonia wanted to do this more than anything and sent the woman up to find out for certain that the coast was clear. As she came back and answered affirmatively, Antonia got up thankfully, climbed the gangway, Léontine following, turned what they called "Windy Corner," and almost ran into the arms of Stigand, who had been sitting smoking on the upper deck.

"Oh," Antonia said, laughing slightly, surprised but not embarrassed, "I expected to find the deck deserted. I came up for some air. I have a headache."

Stigand listened, his eyes on her face. "I'm sorry if I am in the way, but now that I am here won't you make

use of me, to fetch chairs, or rugs, or pillows, or something."

"Thanks, no," Antonia answered, detaining him as he turned away; "I only want to stand up here against the side for perhaps ten minutes, and then I shall be all right. I couldn't sleep, you see; I felt faint."

She moved forward up the deck, Raby following closely, Léontine at a discreet distance behind. She gained the side and leant against it, her white arms on the parapet, the light breeze just stirring her hair and the folds of the garment she had wrapped round her. She made no effort to speak—it was understood that she had a headache—she just stood there enjoying the air, her eyes fixed far out on a patch of water silvered by the moon. Stigand, standing beside her, felt worried about her not being well, it hurt and bothered him in the most surprising way; he would like to have done something actively useful, wrapped her up in rugs, heated some milk, fetched and carried and fussed. She looked as if she was meant to be taken care of—and at the same time as if she didn't want to be.

To do him justice, he had taken in all the details of her appearance without looking a second time; her hair was parted down the middle, and tied in at the neck with blue ribbon, it came far down below her waist. Her feet were thrust cosily into furry moccasins, such as the Red Indians wear, her wrapper was a kind of moonlight-blue—*charmeuse*, he thought women called the stuff—and this was pulled round her in a kind of concealing, revealing way, if such contradictory terms could convey anything to anybody except himself.

"Won't you catch cold?" he said at last, as she

put forward an arm, bare to the elbow, and replaced a wisp of hair that had escaped its imprisoning ribbon.

She turned and looked at him, and her gesture seemed to say, " So you are still there ! I had forgotten you " ; but in her eyes there was something different, something that challenged.

" How could one catch cold on such a night ? "

Suddenly Stigand felt as if the shutters of his brain had opened and closed again, revealing for the fragment of a second a long-forgotten picture. He felt in some curious, inexplicable way that he had done all this before, had seen Antonia standing by the moonlit water, something blue in her hair, the same defiance in her eyes.

" Do you know," he said, speaking eagerly on the spur of the moment, " I have just had a curious sensation. I felt as if I had seen you before, just like this, that we had been through all this together some other time, you and I, only there was more in it, much more. It was only a flash, but for half a second I thought I had grasped it all, and then it floated away again—do you know what I mean ? Have you ever had the same sort of feeling ? "

But Antonia's face had hardened ever so slightly—the mystery had gone out of it, something quite ordinary and nearly akin to triumph had come into it. So he had become personal, this man !—at last. At last the moment had arrived when she would slap him with her little velvet paw, the claws of which he should feel. After all, in spite of his air of detachment, it only needed the hour, the moonlight, and a blue wrapper. She couldn't help smiling inwardly to herself. In the past he had been cool, insolently in-

different—well, now it was her turn. Antonia was spoilt—one can't deny it.

She laughed lightly, turning away. "So many people tell me that, it becomes quite amusing. Of course, the real explanation is that my husband has painted my portrait many times, in many different guises, so that my features by this time are pretty well known."

Raby's eyes had been watching her face as she spoke —the glow of enthusiasm had gone out of them, they were clear and keen and cold. He saw that he had made a mistake, had spoken too soon ; Mrs. Chaine did not mean to let him talk about herself. She, this woman, had either a score against him which she wanted to wipe out, though he didn't know what that could be, or she was so spoilt, so proud, so sure of herself, that she did not mean to let anyone say anything to her, unless she had made up her mind she wanted to hear it. He felt intuitively that they had reached a psychological moment in their acquaintanceship, when it would either ripen into intimacy, or wither away into nothing. A false step now and there would be nothing left but a little sword-play—and he wanted to disarm this woman.

He was half puzzled, but thinking very quickly; he felt that something had to be done at once that would put a very different complexion on the matter.

With an instinct born of experience, he groped in the dark for the cause of the trouble, and very nearly found it. Mrs. Chaine clearly would not allow him to come an inch nearer, she seemed to wish to keep to generalities and platitudes, to dislike his speaking about herself. Very well, he would play a kind of mental three-card trick, like the conjurer, with deliberate intent to

deceive. You think the Queen is *here*, and just as you are about to point to her, lo ! she is *there !*

He turned away indifferently, as if the matter of previous acquaintanceship had already lost interest, and watched the water below.

" Look at the phosphorus ! " he said lazily. " What a divine night, as you say. What a night to be standing by the only woman in the world—She-who-must-be-obeyed. But, of course, it's too good to be true, these things don't happen. It's one of life's little ironies, that when you have the time and the place you haven't the woman, and when you have the woman, well ! the time and place may leave something to be desired. To-night is a sort of fairy story, and yet here I am, standing with you, and you are perhaps thinking of someone else, or at any rate longing to have the deck to yourself, and wishing me and my musings at Jericho ! " He laughed a short, cynical laugh, and his voice was the voice of a tired person who puts down the mask for a moment, reckless of the watching, listening world. The truth was, that in the nick of time he had remembered Daisy Post, had decided to take the plain, bald fact of their relationship to each other, such as it was, and to embroider upon it heavily to the undoing of Mrs. Chaine's reserve—with the identity of Mrs. Post entirely obscured from all possibility of recognition, let it be understood.

Antonia was surprised, taken aback, but she was far from showing it.

" Then your ' She ' exists ? " she said lightly.

" Certainly she does—exists, but far from here, unfortunately."

Antonia was thinking furiously ; her memory carried her back at lightning speed to the hat—the hat with

the wreath of roses round it. So it had turned out to be important—terribly important!

The blood was in her cheeks; she felt excited, and yet somehow cold, as if she had been dashed with ice-water. The fancied insult to herself, the coolness and effrontery she had been nursing and exaggerating had turned out to be nothing after all but indifference born of love for someone else! The whole construction she had been building had gone down like a pack of cards, and with it the small, subtle revenge she had planned to play at, half seriously and half in *coqueterie*.

Moreover, he was perfectly right, this man, and she had no grounds of complaint against him whatever; he had a "She," and therefore, to him, all other women were of no importance. That was the proper outlook, the one she respected and admired; it was thus she would have liked the man she cared about to care for her—if such a person ever existed.

Suddenly she felt that he was watching, that he had a penetration like the prick of a needle. Hitherto she had merely played a waiting game; there was no harm done, but to continue cold now would be playing into his hands; he would merely be amused at her, would imagine that she was piqued by his pre-occupation in another. It takes a long time to tell, but it only took Antonia a second to grasp the situation and make up her mind. It would be quite easy, quite pleasant, and perfectly harmless to show him a little sympathy.

She crept a shade nearer, shuffling childishly in her furry moccasins. "What waste of a lovely night. I wish I could change myself into 'She-who-must-be-obeyed.' It would be so nice for us both; I wish I could help." She turned towards him, wide-eyed,

dangerously sympathetic. Raby looked away over the sea and almost sighed with relief; he felt happy elated—safe. His last card had been a success, it had won the game. This is what he wanted—peace and friendliness—all the rest would come.

"Thanks very much," he said coolly—he could afford to be cool now—"but you can't do anything—nobody can." They had changed places in some subtle way—it was she who was now the warmer, the more friendly of the two. She was just realizing that she had been the least bit foolish, and was proportionately anxious to forget it.

Ten minutes later, the wall of ice between them having melted imperceptibly away, Antonia withdrew to her cabin, feeling strangely bewildered and bereft; leaving Raby in the moonlight, a spirit-woman by his side, one whose form her imagination conjured easily, but whose face she could not see. Vaguely she imagined her to be a young girl, and poor, whereas, in reality, Daisy Post was a widow whose husband had left her very well off.

Raby Stigand and Mrs. Post had a great deal in common; they were in the same world, he admired her very much, respected her rather generous outlook on life and found it refreshing in a woman. Why he didn't love her he couldn't have explained—why one loves one person and not another is a thing that never *can* be explained—she just didn't happen to be his affinity.

Many men had been devoted to Mrs. Post, and she in return had treated most of them carelessly, to say the least of it. She said she couldn't help being a wretch; it wasn't her fault if they didn't make her care. It was the irony of fate, as she recognized herself,

that the only man she had ever loved was Raby Stigand, the one man who didn't really care for her. He was the only man she would still have loved if he *had* cared. He never bored her, for one thing, and when he chose he had very attractive ways.

She was proud of him, proud of having attracted him, proud when she was with him, and this is a sensation—comparatively rare, alas !—that women will go far and do much to experience. She understood him as no one else did, saw through him, had no illusions about the attitude of his mind towards her own sex—and loved him still.

In his relations with men Raby was undoubtedly entirely satisfactory—he was a good friend and a good sportsman, dependable and unselfish ; but a man has two sides to his nature, and in his relationship towards women one supposes that to be anywhere near the right thing he should have been very simple, very strong and an incurable optimist. He should have been the sort of person who believes in women—all women !—who can be led by the nose and humbugged and deceived, otherwise he won't seem to be nice at all, not even to men—for though many of them may treat women quite cavalierly themselves, they can't bear to think of any other man doing it. It makes them angry and indignant—righteously and becomingly indignant !—one wonders if it should be accounted unto them as virtue ?

Now let it be said at once that Raby Stigand was not very simple and not an optimist, and therefore had no pretensions at all to being a hero. He was strong in the sense of being strong-minded—particularly so—and like everybody else who has knocked about the world and sampled everything worth sampling, he was

perfectly simple in his tastes, easy to feed and amuse, and so on. But he wasn't simple-minded, taking everything and everybody for granted—it would be useless and untrue to record it so.

Instead of women treating *him* badly, if there was any question of that sort between them, it was more likely to be he who got the better of *them*, which was quite wrong, of course, and yet was made up for in some degree by his personal charm and pleasant way of doing it. Instead of believing every word they said as if it was the gospel—as all nice men should !—he only believed just as much as he thought might possibly be true. Instead, even, of taking them at their own valuation—sometimes a very low one—he took them at his, and knew some of them to be much better than they would have people believe. And all these things about him Daisy Post understood quite well.

She knew too—and this was in his favour—that he could be relied upon to be very protective in a tight corner, and possibly in a more subtle way than is usual, for where another man would instinctively shield the women he was interested in from physical dangers and difficulties, it came to Raby equally instinctively to shield them in dangers physical, moral, and social—not from the temptation, perhaps—that would only have bored them !—but from the consequences.

In short, he was abominably clear-sighted where women were concerned, abominably independent and sceptical—but he was often very kind. He could even bring himself to be kind to women he wasn't the least in love with—an accomplishment few men can achieve. He had learnt all about it, and how to be it, in the wilds, where good-fellowship is everything and the manners and customs of Mayfair very little use.

The real trouble with him was that he knew too much, and could look after himself " too jolly well "—as his friends said. He was a tough nut for any woman to crack, but like other tough nuts, the capacity was in him to get very badly cracked when it did happen.

It wasn't his fault exactly, that he was made like this, it was the natural consequence of his having always chosen his friends and acquaintances from the very most amusing people in the world to which he belonged—the most amusing ones not necessarily being the most virtuous or the most reliable.

From his boyhood upwards he had known brilliant women, charming women, beautiful women, unscrupulous women, and they had made a fool of him just often enough for him to see to it that it didn't go on happening. In self-defence, like the chameleon, he had been obliged to take his colour from his surroundings as a form of natural protection—and it had become a habit. It's the action of the world—everybody who chooses rather to be amused has to go through with it—has to be first disillusioned, and then given time to regain their poise and their sense of humour—always excepting the few enchanted beings who seem to float through life like joyous wraiths, not touching and not touched. But Raby was " earthy "—there was nothing of the wraith about him—and yet in spite of all these things, he was a genuine person. Underneath all his prickles and scepticism and lack of faith, there was a real Raby who wouldn't willingly do anybody an injury—a man who had a reserve of strength and love and sympathy and respect and quiet thoughtfulness hidden away, like treasure, waiting for She-of-the-golden-key to come forward and unlock the door.

It was this side of his nature, as yet not much de-

veloped, that Daisy Post divined and wanted to touch ; it seemed a cruel trick of fate that, capable as she was of understanding his demands and supplying his needs, she couldn't be the right woman.

With all her faults, she had something staunch and sporting about her ; she was like a gambler who stakes his all and means to win or lose like a gentleman. She was madly in love with Raby, but she never let him know it. He thought she cared for him in the same way he cared for her, no more and no less—that he suited her as she suited him, and that either of them was free to say good-bye at any moment without doing any violence to the feelings of the other.

If he had, for one moment, thought any otherwise, he would have had it out with her, have criticized her severely for breaking an unspoken contract, quite regardless of her feelings, and then left—for good. Rightly or wrongly, that was his idea of playing the game ; he would not have gone on with it another day knowing that she cared and that he never could.

But he didn't ask himself what his intentions were towards Mrs. Chaine that night on the yacht—didn't analyse or dissect. Perhaps if he had he might have been surprised to find that a new and unexpected element had crept in. Unconsciously he had already placed Antonia on a pedestal ; was thinking not only of himself, but of her.

CHAPTER X

NEXT morning Raby Stigand and Mrs. Chaine met almost as old friends, and from that time on they were constantly together, always with the understanding in Antonia's mind that Raby was in love with someone else. Sometimes the someone else was even mentioned in a shadowy sort of way, alluded to as "She," or "She-who-must-be-obeyed."

"Is that the sort of place you would like to share with your 'She'?" Antonia would say, pointing to some specially romantic-looking villa, with gardens sloping down to the water's edge.

"Yes," Raby replied. "Wouldn't it be perfect?"

"Perfect," Antonia answered musingly. "And now probably someone lives there who doesn't appreciate it a bit."

"Almost certain, I should think. A retired shopkeeper, for preference, with a commercial mind and a fat old wife he has long ceased to take any interest in. Such is life!"

"What a cynic you are. Do you ever see any romance in the world?"

"Oh yes, sometimes; but one has to find it for oneself, and when one has found it, to hold it very tight, shield it very carefully, put it in a little shrine, and take care that it never leaves one again."

It was quite soon after their midnight meeting that an incident happened which drew them even closer together. At Palermo a certain German diplomat came

on board to lunch, and in the course of a conversation afterwards with Antonia and Raby he remarked, "I have been a fellow-sufferer in the same house as an American artist of your name, Madame, quite lately, in Berlin."

Antonia laughed. "'American artist' sounds rather like my husband; he is in Berlin, but not suffering, that I know of."

The German looked surprised; he understood English well, but not in shades of thought.

"Ah?—your husband? Not suffering, you say? Indeed you are mistaken, Madame; his sufferings have been very acute, I understand, but happily they are now nearly over."

Raby glanced at Antonia; her eyes were large and startled. "I do not understand," she said quickly. "Where have you been?"

"In the same nursing home. I have had appendicitis. You will be glad to hear the latest news of your husband, no doubt. The doctor himself told me the operation had been most successful; he seemed relieved; for he had been afraid for Mr. Chaine."

Antonia's gravity broke up; she laughed with evident relief.

"For one minute you frightened me, but, after all, it cannot be my husband; he has not been ill at all."

The diplomat joined in the laughter. "I have been a false alarmist then—I beg your pardon. What a curious coincidence. He was a strange man, this Chaine. When I was better I offered to go in and chat with him, but he would receive no one. Naturally, lying ill oneself, one took an interest in the other cases. I do not know what he had, however, but it was a case that gave the doctors and nurses much anxiety."

"So you never saw him?" Antonia said lightly, unconcernedly.

"No, he would not; he was peculiar, unsociable—but one expects eccentricity in a great artist."

"A great artist?" Antonia said slowly.

"Yes—Adam Chaine—for me he is the greatest portrait-painter of the day."

In the pause that followed Antonia never moved a muscle or made a sound. Raby, applying a match to a cigarette, sought her eyes between the flickering flame and a puff of smoke. He found them full of tears.

He felt an instant longing to protect her, to make her feel she was less alone.

Down the deck Madame Duval was calling for her German friend; he turned away in answer to the call, and these two were left alone together.

Raby tactfully said nothing; he had realized the situation, but he had no vulgar curiosity to know more. He left it to Antonia to treat the matter exactly as she thought best, to ignore it if she wished.

It seemed ages before she turned to him.

"Please," she said in a hesitating way, quite unlike her usual manner, "please don't ever tell the story of how my husband didn't see fit to tell me anything about his illness." She twisted her hands in a helpless way and there was something pathetic about her that appealed to him powerfully.

Raby was by nature very slow to blame or accuse; he would have thought it an impertinence to judge Adam Chaine's actions, unheard; between a man and a woman, as he knew well, no mere outsider should dare to interfere. Yet, on the face of it, he felt that Antonia, as a wife and as a woman, had been cheated out of something which should have been her natural

right. She looked it; looked as if she had been numbed and dazed and shocked; he felt extraordinarily sympathetic, but, nevertheless, he repressed any inclination to show a verbal sympathy.

He made a gesture of dissent. "Need you ask? What are you going to do?"

"I can't do anything."

"You won't go to him?"

She looked at him steadily, the pupils of her eyes large and dilated.

"You don't know Adam," she said in a low voice, adding, "He didn't wish me to know, so I shall always pretend to have heard nothing."

Raby blew a ring of smoke; he seemed to be thinking. "I expect you know best."

The subject was closed between them, but it had served its turn in bringing them nearer together. There is nothing like a secret shared.

Antonia never tried after this to shut Raby out of her confidence; on the contrary, she admitted him, ranked him as a friend, perhaps her greatest friend; told him many things about herself and other people that she never told anybody else.

She asked him questions too, chiefly about his home and his mother; his father, she knew, had died when he was quite young. All women are desperately interested in the unknown mothers of the men they are in love with—not necessarily the men they marry. Antonia was never tired of wondering things about Mrs. Stigand—just how much she cared for Raby, what she dressed him in when he was a little boy, if she kissed him often, and other things of the same sort. Raby, she knew, loved and admired his mother with quite unusual devotion—Antonia was glad, she cherished the

thought. Little as she had had to do with mothers, the relationship of mother and son she considered an exquisite tie. Her questions were very gentle, very delicate, with a sort of hush in them ; for nothing in the world, either for Raby or herself, would she have rubbed the bloom off anything so wonderful and almost divine. His mother was his own, a sacred subject ; Antonia only wanted, now and then, to be allowed a peep into a Holy of Holies she had never known.

Raby never knew the least what she felt when she asked him questions—men never do.

In all the other ways he and she seemed to have so much in common ; even singly and apart they were of the nature that sees more *colour* in things than it is granted to the common herd to see. But when they were together this power became doubled and trebled.

They were very lucky too in living, for a short time at least, a life with endless colour in it ; they did wonderful and delicious things together, saw scene upon scene under the best conditions. For it is one thing to see the world's beauty spots alone, or in uncongenial society, and quite another to see them with the only other person who really matters. It seems a little sad, on reflection, that although the gates of the world are thrown wide open, for any who like to pass through, yet comparatively few ever encompass the experience of seeing it all under this magical influence—uplifting, inspiring, improving to the character as it must be.

The public laws forbid ; the hard, inflexible, necessary laws, made by man, not for the individual, but for the common weal.

Therefore in this at least they were lucky, these

two—no matter what happened afterwards. They scaled the heights of Taormina together, and saw Mount Etna on the right, and the blue sea below, through the ruins of the Colosseum—with each other's profile as an alternate view ; they sat long hours high up on the ancient terrace of the Capuchin monks at Amalfi, poised as it were between earth and sky ; they wandered over the Isle of Capri, they exchanged views on life in the wonderful garden of the Villa Aegeia, its brilliant flowers bounded by the turquoise sea.

In many ways Raby educated Antonia ; he knocked her about, metaphorically speaking, and that is always good for anyone. He buffeted her intellect, shook up her intelligence, did battle to her prejudices, teased all the prudery and narrow-mindedness there is in so many women, completely out of her. He told her plain, unvarnished truths, insisted on talking of human things, gave her his views on everything from politics to love, demanding hers in return.

It was up on deck late one night that he said to her musingly, " It's an odd sensation when you are unmarried, like me, to watch the married ones turning in. I wonder what it feels like ; do you think I should like it ? "

Antonia didn't answer ; she had often wondered the same thing herself.

" You needn't answer—I know I should, with the right woman."

Still Antonia didn't speak ; she was in a silent mood. Raby watched her, amused.

" So you disapprove of marriage as a system ? "

Antonia turned, surprised. " Of course not—how can you say it ? "

" I thought you looked as if you did."

He had a mischievous gleam in his eye. Antonia laughed ; she was not going to deny the faint accusation of prudery, she would wait another opportunity.

" Do you think the Darleys get on well together ? " Raby asked a minute later, alluding to a couple on board. Here was the opportunity.

" No, not my idea of getting on well," Antonia said slowly ; " he never goes in to say ' good night ' to her."

" How do you know ? "

" I was in her cabin the other night, and she told me."

" What a fool he must be ! "

" Why ? " surprised.

" Because she's lovely."

Antonia digested this.

" Is that reason enough ? "

" I should think so."

" Perhaps he doesn't admire her, incredible as it may seem."

" Oh, that can't be—he married her."

" Wouldn't you marry anyone you didn't admire ? "

" Certainly not—I couldn't."

Through intercourse with Raby, Antonia gradually found herself understanding many things differently from the way she had understood them before, seeing people and problems from his point of view—and whatever else it may have lacked, his point of view was an essentially masculine one.

And all the time that they talked and discussed he watched her face and knew he was falling madly in love with her, if he hadn't done it already, in the beginning.

He began to know all the little intimate things about her, the things that count for so much, that creep into

the heart and the memory and stick and stick—the things that can never be entirely uprooted, and that nobody else, ever after, can do in quite the same way.

He knew at what time she got up in the morning, at just what hour she began to looked fagged at night ; he knew the way she sat down to a writing-table and nibbled the end of her jade penholder, while she thought of what she was going to say ; knew the sort of people and things and books and flowers she chose as friends. He knew the black satin cushion, embroidered in Chinese blue, that she brought up on deck every morning to tuck into her back, or rest her head upon ; it became a sacred object, in comparison to which other people's red and green and blue cushions were common, uninspiring objects, singularly lacking in interest. He knew just how happy she was, and how unhappy, how dissatisfied with life ; he knew the size of her foot and the way her hair grew on her forehead, and the scent of her hands. He knew that strawberries gave her a tiny rash behind her ear, and therefore she mustn't be allowed to eat them, however much she wanted to ; knew that he must find an excuse for getting her out of the hot dining-room when there was a swell on, or she would grow white and feel sick. He had favourite dresses and jewels and hats and footgear, and would ask her to put them on to please his taste. He could shut his eyes at any hour of the day or night and call her face up before him.

Sometimes he thought he knew everything about her, could answer for what she would say or do under any given circumstance, and then something would happen, some situation arise, some topic be discussed, and Antonia's word and action would be baffling, unexpected, plunged in mystery. Raby knew now what was

meant by the " Eternal Riddle " ; hitherto he had been lazily satisfied to leave it unsolved.

He wondered if he would ever really know Antonia, and felt that certainly he never could till he had seen her in her own surroundings ; here she was only a guest, a flower temporarily transplanted to a foreign soil.

He never thought for a second that the belief in her mind that he cared for another woman could possibly make any difference in the long run ; he had merely utilized the ruse as a short cut to intimacy, and he hadn't done with it yet. He didn't quite understand her, was far from feeling sure of her ; it never occurred to him that Antonia might be unlikely to let him feel sure while she thought he loved someone else.

He was an idealist about love ; he considered that real love affairs were in the hands of fate, that if they, Antonia and himself, were the two people in the world for each other, if she was meant to care for him, she would inevitably do so, woman or no woman. It hadn't made any difference to his falling in love with *her*, that she already had a husband—the idea was ridiculous, unthinkable.

But in applying this theory to a woman, he was both wrong and right.

It didn't make any difference to her caring for him, but it made all the difference to her showing it, or acknowledging it, for a long time, even to herself. Antonia was attributing her interest in Raby to a sympathetic friendship ; she told herself that she quite understood that he was in love with someone else, and didn't mind. She was fond of him as a friend and an attractive personality.

But sometimes it would come over her that she had been too nice to him, considering that he belonged

to someone else, too intimate, too friendly—then it was that she would retrace her footsteps as it were, double back on herself! Small wonder that he couldn't always understand!

Meanwhile the time galloped on, till the last evening on the yacht had arrived; on the morrow the party was breaking up, dispersing its units to various parts of the world.

"You go on to another villa, don't you?" Raby said to Antonia, as they both stood against the rail, surveying, from the deck of the yacht, the little Italian port where they had dropped anchor.

"Yes—that is what I have told the others, and in a way it's true. But as a matter of fact it isn't exactly what it sounds. I am going to lead the very simple life for a week—I only wish to goodness it could be longer." Her voice was genuinely regretful.

"It won't suit you—I'm sure you don't really like it."

"You don't understand me," Antonia answered, "if you think that. It's true I don't care for ugly, sordid, suburban poverty, the sort that is lodging-housey, and smells of soapsuds and boiled cabbage, but I adore the open-air, sunburnt kind, that garbs itself in a shirt wide open at the neck and bathes in the sea and lives on spaghetti."

Raby was interested. "And is that what you are going to do?"

"Yes."

"I wish I was coming too."

"You wouldn't like it really—you might have to clean your own boots."

"Do *you?*"

"No—*I* don't—but as you are a man you might have to."

"That would be very simple—I should take a clean pair of boots for every day."

"Very ingenious—but I despise your spirit."

"Do you really think I couldn't clean boots?"

Antonia sized him up. "No—I think you could, but I doubt if you would enjoy it."

"Lord!" Raby said, "do I look a tenderfoot like that? As if I haven't struck my own tent, cooked my own food when there was any to cook, soled my own boots, and patched my own garments for weeks and months together."

Antonia laughed. "Ah well, if I'd seen you doing all that I might think better of you."

"I wish you had seen me. Are you going to stay with friends, or are you leading the simple life alone?"

"With friends—two pearls beyond all price—which is my way of saying that they are not the least like anybody else and a thousand times more precious."

"Tell me more," Raby said. It was one of his most attractive qualities that he could listen really well to people who interested him—he liked listening—it was a pleasure to him. He had a trick of fixing his cold, intelligent eyes on the speaker, conveying the comfortable assurance that his attention was chained and unlikely to wander. If underneath, all unknown to them, he happened to be criticizing with an inward smile or two at their expense, it didn't really matter, since he kept any surmises and conjectures to himself and didn't give them out as facts, as most folk seem tempted to do.

But if he happened *not* to be interested, he was just as selfish as possible—neither looking, listening, or paying any attention whatever.

"If you really want to know," Antonia said, in

answer to his question, "they are a He and a She. He is Michel, and She is Emma—'Gemma' He calls her."

"They are married?"

"Yes."

"And where do you come in exactly?"

"Well, you see, she was an English girl who suddenly wandered from the most entombed of country vicarages into a studio in Florence. At least she thinks she is English, but I think there must be a misunderstanding somewhere, for she has black eyes and black hair, and the only life that could possibly ever have suited her is the life she is leading now. At the studio she was one of Adam, my husband's, worshippers; I don't know why, but I took a fancy to her, and asked her to come to tea; we have been fond of each other ever since. She told me she was in love with a Sicilian boy, who also worked in the studio—I met him too. He was just such another child of nature as herself. So I helped on the marriage all I could, and now they have a child of their own, a dear, fat, brown thing, and I am its godmother. I go and stay with them every year, if I can."

"I take it that they haven't more money than they know what to do with?"

"No! They paint when they feel inspired, and they make between them anything from one to two hundred pounds a year. They think it amply sufficient."

"Where do they live? Why can't I go and live there too? It would just suit the state of my exchequer."

"Where?" Antonia said, laughing. "It's a sort of Paradise. You land here and drive along the coast till you come to a bay, with pine woods coming down to the water's edge, and there you step into a blue boat, rowed by a man with black eyes and gold earrings.

He pulls you across, and when he shelves the boat gently on the shingle, you jump out, climb over the sea-wall, and go up a sort of track. I can't call it a road, though carts do go along it if necessary. Then you stop at a green gate, open it, and go down a fairy-like path, between pine trees and bushes of mimosa and lilac and rambling roses, to a house built on a rock that juts out into the sea, forming the farthest point of the bay. The house has no windows, only green shutters, that loop up clumsily with a bit of leather and a button, like the doors of the rabbit-hutch I had when I was a child. If you wanted to keep the rain out you would have to shut the shutters, I suppose, and darken the room, but whenever I have been there the sun is always shining, and the shutters stand open night and day. From the other side of the house, away from the garden, you look out on the sea, and right down beneath you on to dark rocks and boulders. The house itself is whitewashed, and has a dome roof, like an egg cut longways in half. Do you see it all ? "

" I love it—please go on. What do they do in winter ? "

" Ah ! don't try to spoil it. In winter they go to a tower in Florence, on the wrong side of the river. It's almost as fascinating, but not quite."

" I apologize—how stupid of me to be so practical. What is Gemma like ? "

" She's very handsome, like a gipsy, and superbly healthy ; the simplest, most direct, most unafraid, true-to-herself person I've ever met."

" And Michel ? "

" Well ! He's a red-haired Sicilian. He's very healthy too. You wouldn't ask him for his tailor's address—but he is an artist to his finger-tips. He

paints trees, Adam says, as few people can. He smokes a great deal, and swims at all hours of the day, and laughs and mends the boats, and does the gardens. He is like a boy, except about his wife—he is a man to her. By that I mean that he is entirely capable of looking after her—you do understand, don't you ? "

" Of course I do. You like that quality, I can see ? "

" Yes, I do," Antonia said simply, " because lots of men haven't got it."

Next morning the party broke up ; they sped away by various trains, some to Paris, some to England, some to Rome, all except Raby Stigand and Antonia, who came off the yacht together, having two little carriages waiting for them up on the white road.

" Good-bye," Raby said, as he handed her in, " I've been thinking of the little house without windows. I wish it was mine, and that you were going to be my guest."

" I forgot to tell you about the servant," Antonia said ; " there is only one picturesque Italian woman who used to look after the studio. She does everything. Doesn't that put you off ? "

" Not in the least."

" There is no hot water laid on."

" My beard isn't obstinate, it comes off with cold. Where are you going now ? "

" To the hotel, to drop Léontine and the luggage, and change. I couldn't go in these "—looking down at her white linen dress and shoes—" I'm only taking a valise —and leaving Léontine behind."

" My train for Constantinople doesn't go for eight hours," Raby said. " May I escort you to the blue boat ? It would be a new sensation, seeing someone off to Paradise."

"Very well; but it's a two-hours' drive along the coast—isn't it too long?"

"It will be a godsend."

They went up to the hotel and Antonia disappeared for a short time, to reappear again minus parasol, veils, and all fashionable paraphernalia. She was dressed in a blue serge skirt, a blue knitted sweater open at the throat, and a little blue cap—not a dark, hot, dusty-looking blue, but a happy, sunny shade eminently suited to the weather.

She was followed by Léontine, valise in hand.

"Is that all you are going to take?" Raby said.

"That's all!"

They drove away, leaving Léontine behind, looking after them from the hotel steps.

Soon the little straggling town was left behind, and once on the outskirts, their driver took to the coast road, the land shelving away at their feet down to the blue waters of the Mediterranean. For a mile or two they went along through olive trees, the blue of the sea peeping up at them between the grey-green leaves of the olives, then rocks for a while, with great bushes of yellow broom breaking out all over them, and instead of peeps at the sea, a great wide sweep opened up before their eyes. Again they passed through small forests of pines, reaching down to the shore; and all along Nature, just to amuse herself, had planted big patches of purple foxglove.

"Isn't it divine, that purple against the blue?" Antonia said in a soft, contented voice. "It makes me feel as if everything is all right."

Sometimes the road turned inland for a while, passing through groves of orange and lemon trees dangling their load of fruit temptingly over low, grey,

crumbling moss and fern-covered stone walls, pursuing its way through tiny towns where the *Mairie*, looking very priggish and red-tapey, stood in state in the middle of the square surrounded by frivolous pink almond trees all in riotous bloom, with perhaps a very prolific wistaria as a rival. The inhabitants, picturesquely unwashed, sat about in the doors of their little shops, hugging their *bambinos* or brushing each other's hair if they were women, smoking and playing diabolo if they were men, while fat brown children lay in the horses' wooden troughs and wriggled happily in the sun.

On and on, very much in this fashion, the road wound its way, through a few miles of vineyards, back again to the coast.

Raby broke a lengthy silence; he stretched his long legs in front of him with a sigh and looked at Antonia. "I'm happy. But it's only going to make it worse later."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know—think of the train to Constantinople!"

"Of course it won't be like this lovely road."

"I always loved the Italian Riviera, but I don't know what has come over it to-day. It's transcendentally beautiful; it's bathed in gold."

Antonia ignored his remark. "Here's the bay," she cried, "just round the bend—and there's the blue boat."

"It's all exactly as you described," Raby said a few minutes later, lifting his hat in farewell, while Antonia, her valise at her feet, stood looking up at him from the boat, now dancing gently in the water; "even to the black eyes and the gold earrings. It is like Paradise

and the Peri—you are going in, but I am the poor Peri who is left outside."

Antonia laughed. "The gift you bring isn't good enough, you see. It doesn't open the golden gate."

"Yet it's the best, the very best, I've got," Raby answered, his eyes on her face. Antonia looked away; he often said things like that quite seriously; she couldn't quite understand, hadn't placed them.

"Would you really like to come? Do you think it would do you any good?"

"I know it is just what I need."

They were looking at each other steadily. Antonia knew that he meant what he said. "If you'd really like to come—come," she said suddenly. This was one of her moments of surprise.

Raby raised his eyebrows. "I should love it, but—but, is it possible without bothering anyone, or causing you inconvenience?"

Antonia understood him perfectly.

"Yes, it is possible," she said; "you see, Michel and Gemma haven't a trace of vulgarity in them. They will never think the things the world thinks. I shall tell them that you are a wee bit tired of life as you live it, that you are a friend of mine, and that I think they will be good for you. They will be delighted—they will think it just as simple—as simple—" she looked about for inspiration—"as it really is."

Raby tore a sheet out of his note-book, scribbled a message about some garments, sent it back to the hotel by the driver of the carriage, and stepped into the blue boat.

"Thank you. It was too good to miss."

"Giovanni will come back again for your valise," Antonia said, as they pushed off. "Isn't it lovely?—

this is Michel and Gemma's equivalent for the English way of having you met at the station."

It was with curious eyes that Raby watched Antonia jump from the boat when it touched the other side, and throw her arms round the necks of two people, one after the other, and then embrace a third party, very much lower down and nearer to the earth.

"Tonita," he heard them all saying at once. "Tonita, it's lovely to have you here again. Tonita, you are more beautiful than ever. Tonita, do you think the *bambino* has grown?"

"Tonita!" he said to himself. "Tonita! Of course —why didn't I think of that?"

"Michel—Gemma," Antonia cried, turning round, "I've brought a friend, Mr. Raby Stigand. I want you to do us both heaps of good, we need it. You two are the best medicine I know."

Raby had a very attractive smile; he looked at Gemma and Michel, and they looked at him. The liking was instantaneous and mutual.

From beginning to end the week was perfect; it started as these things always should start, without effort, on an inspiration; there wasn't an hour or a minute of it that was not a complete success. Antonia's instinct for the fitness of things hadn't played her false, no man in the world could have fitted into the picture better than Raby.

Next morning, out in a boat, Raby rowing, Antonia lazily drawing the fingers of one hand through the water, he said to her:

"Where is the discomfort you mentioned? I've been looking for it everywhere. I've never been so happy in my life, or had such a nice bedroom."

As a matter of fact the bedrooms were quite unlike

any others ; one would say, looking round them, that those who had arranged them had never seen an ordinary conventional bedroom, but had let their own individual inclinations have full play. In their simple way they were the work of an artist. The floors were unpolished boards, extraordinarily clean ; indeed, the whole atmosphere of the rooms gave one the impression that they were washed over by sea-water every day and dried by the sun, which was, in effect, what really did happen to them. The walls had been painted by Michel ; he had started out with no plan or fixed conventional design, and no measurements, but had turned in with pots of distempery-looking paint, a special mixture of his own, and had let himself run riot.

Raby's room had a mediæval look about it ; the walls depicted the story of a hunt with hawks ; the figures, dressed in quaint garments and pointed caps, hunted their quarry amidst dark green trees laden with big yellow fruit. It had the same feeling as some of the very early decoration still to be seen here and there in the dark, mysterious castle of Amboise.

Antonia's room was a study in trees—the cypress trees of Italy, against a dark blue background.

The beds in both were like the bunks of a ship, let down from the wall, supported by two legs. In the corner of every room, against the outer wall of the house, a short length of piping, ending in a rusty-looking tap, appeared surprisingly through a hole in the skirting ; under the tap there was a stone arrangement that caught the drippings and carried them away down a water-pipe outside. One drew all the water one required for oneself ; it was cold, of course, but there was plenty of it. Against another wall there was an old Italian oak cupboard, high and narrow, but

charming in design. This was for clothes—the only receptacle provided. Under the window stood a wicker table of green wattles, like the baskets made by the Italian peasants one can buy any day in the market-places. On this was a big bowl—one of those earthen-ware bowls of many colours English people bring back to country houses to hold potpourri. These were the washstand and the basin respectively.

Against the remaining wall stood a long wooden trough, about the height of an ordinary table, quite rude in design, and painted green. This was filled with growing flowers, pink almond trees, or camellias or azaleas as the case might be.

On the wall above it, level with the face of a person of ordinary height, was nailed a mirror in an old gilt frame. Michel thought it a pretty idea that a woman should look at her face framed in flowers. One great, tall wooden candlestick, standing five feet from the ground, with a fat candle in it, like those used in Catholic churches, and one green wicker garden chair, completed the furniture of the room.

"Yes, isn't it delightful, your room?" Antonia replied to Raby's remark. "I remember it from last year. You ought to see mine. It is painted in trees, Michel's speciality, and one day, when he is a great man, plutocrats from America will come here and barter for the whole room, to remove it bodily to their own country. You will see—that will happen. Isn't it horrible to think of?"

"I should like to see your room," Raby said quietly.

That night he carried Antonia's candle for her, up the wooden stairs as far as her door. She threw it open and invited him to inspect. He did so, admiring the

quaintness of it all, and the rather weird effect of the cypress trees in the flickering candle-light.

"Do you think you ought to sleep with those flowers?" he said, as he turned to go, pointing to the pink almond trees. "I don't know anything about these things, but that's what my old nurse used to say."

Antonia smiled. "Yes, I think I ought. I wouldn't turn them out for anything. They suit me and I suit them. Don't they look fresh?"

"Yes, I should think they did," Raby said slowly. "They would be strange flowers that failed to thrive in *your* room. Good night."

Antonia sat down on the bed when he had departed.

"Why does he say things just like that?" she thought to herself. "I suppose—I suppose—it's a habit."

For one week these two saw each other at their very best; they played like children, pretending nothing. Raby never attempted to make love to Antonia, it wouldn't have been playing the game. "Love" was in the scheme of things, yes!—but not "making love." That would have been an inartistic, foreign element. It wouldn't have been fair to anyone, not to Antonia, or Gemma, or Michel, or even the *bambino*. They decided, too, that Mr. Stigand and Mrs. Chaine were appellations distinctly out of the picture. It was quite a serious error, they thought. "You had better call me Antonia," said that lady gravely.

"I would rather call you 'Tonita.' It suits you. Besides, I don't suppose anyone else in England calls you that, do they?"

"No, they don't."

"That's splendid. I don't grudge it to Michel and Gemma, but I should to anyone else. Then I may?"

"I suppose so."

"My name is Raby, unless you can think of anything better."

"I can't."

The world, for both of them, seemed to be full of pictures just about this time; to Raby they were pictures of Antonia.

Tonita, in her black bathing-dress, sitting on a rock in the sun, dabbling her white toes in the water; Tonita lying on the roof, baking, a book between her elbows; Tonita wandering through the gardens at night after supper, the moonlight on her face, or sitting idle in the evenings after the lamps were lit, while Gemma sewed and the others carpentered. He liked her idle best, she seemed to be there solely to give other people pleasure.

Particularly he would recall the picture of Tonita lying asleep in the garden one afternoon, in the dappled shade of some lilac bushes. He had come upon her unawares, had watched her with a quite peculiar sensation, had tip-toed into the house for a light rug to throw over her feet, and as he had bent over her in the act of arranging it, he had again experienced the sudden, startling conviction that he had done it all before.

But when? Where and when had Antonia lain in the shade, while he had ministered to her wants, frantically in imperious haste? It had been an occasion of particular mental anguish, he felt sure of that—and yet, just as the recollection seemed to be materializing in his brain, it faded away again, out of his grasp. His memory couldn't hold it, couldn't deliver it up in concrete form, any more than a man's hand can hold a wreath of smoke.

As for Antonia, the world for her was full of pictures

of Raby, the most homely, fascinating sort of pictures her life had ever known: Raby dropping off the rocks into the bay below, and swimming with a strong overhead stroke; Raby frying eggs one day that Maria the maid had to go and see her parents; Raby rowing, with bare brown arms and uncovered head; Raby sitting in the garden, with the *bambino* on his knee, alternately teasing and playing with him; Raby carpentering in the evening, making a little boat, perfectly happy, obviously content.

She often smiled to herself at one particular recollection; it seemed funny when she remembered the sort of person he had appeared to be the first time they had ever met. One evening he had been solemnly watching Gemma mix the *bambino's* food; he had even been handing her the necessary utensils.

"What are those things?" he said.

"Rusks—tops and bottoms they are called."

"Tops and bottoms—I shall remember that. I like the tops best—they are jolly good" (nibbling one). "What do you do next?"

"Beat them through a sieve."

"And then add this milk?"

"Yes."

"Is that really good for him?"

"Doesn't he look well?"

"Certainly he does—and is that all he has for supper?"

"That's all."

Raby wasn't laughing; he was interested, absorbed. It was extraordinary the way he could absorb himself in anything.

He looked up, caught Antonia's eyes, and laughed. "You needn't smile. It may come in very useful. I

should know now how to keep a child alive if I was ever thrown up on a desert island with one."

"Perhaps there wouldn't be any rusks," Antonia suggested.

"It doesn't matter—I've got the hang of it now. I should have to do my best with powdered cocoanut or crushed bananas or something."

The day came when they stood again on a railway platform, conventionally garbed—Antonia bound for England, Raby for Constantinople.

"Good-bye," Raby said, as the train was on the point of leaving, "I loved your Paradise, Tonita, and I loved your friends. I've known now what it is to be perfectly happy—and you?"

She smiled at him as the train steamed out—it satisfied him somehow, even while he couldn't swear that she meant "yes."

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Antonia had settled down again in London and Raby had returned from Constantinople, in due course, without any unnecessary haste, he came to call. It was then that Antonia experienced her first faint shock of surprise; he was not quite the same, although she couldn't explain the difference; she discovered, too, that he had been back a fortnight, and yet this was the first attempt to see her he had made.

However, he was quite satisfactory just for the moment; with his usual capacity for absorption, he was tremendously interested in the house, which was certainly worth looking at. Antonia was pleased; she liked people who *knew* to take an interest in the things Adam and she had collected intelligently. Besides, Raby had a way of making her feel that her house was her own personality expressed, her imagination in concrete form, her thoughts and fancies in tangible shape. It was the kind of subtle flattery he knew so well how to express, conveying it somehow with very few words and no sickly sentiment whatever.

In his own particular, easy way, he was at home in Antonia's house in five minutes.

It was in the first time or two that he was duly introduced to Adam; strangely enough, he began by disliking him, and ended by liking him, but this was only after he had quite made up his mind as to his relationship towards Antonia.

Antonia was secretly rather annoyed that when Raby came to dine, he spent most of the evening talking to Adam, Adam appearing to be equally interested in him. After that, he was allowed to go into Adam's studio whenever he liked, Adam would even show him things and invite his criticism. They had long and deep discussions about countries and people and politics. He got to know the house from beginning to end, knew where everything was kept, from Antonia's bundle of music under the piano to the lemon drops in a jade-box on her dressing-table. He knew how the cook cooked and the butler butled, knew that the first footman was engaged to the second housemaid, and took an interest in them all. He was interested in everything that was Antonia's, however small and trivial. Undoubtedly he had a special gift of humour and sympathy. Not that he always praised —that would have been dull; sometimes he criticized, suggested improvements. "Don't play 'Gerontius,'" he would say to Antonia. "You don't hit it off."

"Why not?"

"I don't know why, but you don't. Play something else."

The first time Antonia showed him her bedroom he looked round quickly, appreciatively, noting everything—the oak panelling, the carved four-poster, the embroidered coverlet, the Persian rugs, the genuine old crimson damask hangings, the gem of a dressing-table, with its dainty array. Some people might have expected it to be more luxurious, whereas it was restrained and slightly severe. Then he sat down on the end of the bed with a sigh of pleasure.

"Pretty useful sort of room, Tonita."

"Do you like it?"

"Love it—it's the nicest I've seen. I think a woman's bedroom ought to be rich in colour, and big and airy and mysterious."

"You don't think there are too few things?"

"I think it's just like you." He was still looking about. "Where do your feet come to in this vast bed—here?" He made a dent with his hand.

"I don't know."

He got up and began to walk restlessly about the room, picking up one object after the other, and putting it down again. "I want to get married—will you help me?"

"Why?"

"I want to live in an atmosphere like this—my rooms are cold and uninspiring enough, goodness knows. I want to live among silks and embroideries and lace and bottles. I like this smell too—why is it women smell so nice? I should like to wake up in the morning and see a thing like that over the chair," pointing to Antonia's wrapper. "I love women's things. Help me to get married, Tonita."

Antonia laughed, but she wasn't quite sure that she liked the turn the conversation had taken. She was glad he liked her bedroom, she wanted him to particularly, had looked forward to it—but she didn't wish the attraction of it to make him think of marrying someone else. She led him downstairs again as soon as possible.

In a very short time Raby's position in the Chaines' household, his right to be there and his welcome, were assured, an established fact. He had even become on intimate terms with her friends, and accepted them as his own—John Orlebar, Susan Wing, Freddy Ramsden, and the rest.

Then it was that Antonia experienced one shock of surprise after another, until she became accustomed to the existing conditions.

She had vaguely supposed that Raby in London would be the same person as Raby in Italy—that he would be there to tease her and take her out, to admire and appreciate, criticize and make life interesting, just as he had in the South.

But this was very far from being Raby's intention or theory of life.

Down there, yachting in the sun, it had been easy to loaf with Antonia—after all, that is what he had been invited for, to loaf with some woman. But London was a very different place. London stood for habits of thought, and rules and restrictions of life; it stood for his work and his associates; it meant a certain standard of comportment, and the things people do and the things that "aren't done." London was life, the other had been a picnic.

Besides, the loafing had been in the very beginnings; he always loafed with women for a little while, but they had very soon to make up their minds whether he was to go or stay.

It never entered into his scheme of things to make love to a married woman for nothing, with no end in view. That would have been what he called being a "lap-dog," and a lap-dog in his eyes was the pinnacle of everything that was unutterable and awful. Women were there to be loved and lied for, mastered and caressed, and sometimes bullied for their own good, but never to be escorted to tea-parties and followed about with mackintoshes. If a man allowed himself to be treated like that, it was his own fault; he deserved what he got, or rather, what he didn't get.

Antonia was different from any other woman in the world; she was sacred. She was *his* woman, to be worshipped, put on a pedestal, married. He knew that a little sooner or a little later, it made no difference which, he meant to ask Antonia to get her marriage annulled, or to run away with him—that was a fixed purpose that nothing in the world would ever change. She was to be his in no mere vulgar, roundabout, surreptitious fashion; she was to go away with him for ever and ever.

Therefore, to have run after Antonia, just to be allowed to make love to her, was unthinkable; to have run after her for nothing was being a lap-dog. He didn't run after her.

She had to be taught to care, and making a slave of himself wasn't the way to teach her. She would have to know what it was to miss him as well as to want him.

He knew that for Antonia to consent to run away with him would be a tremendous wrench; it would mean, for one thing, giving up the life she had grown accustomed to. Also, he had gathered that, for some reason he couldn't understand, Antonia took her contract with Adam very seriously. He couldn't understand it, convinced as he was of the nature of the contract. He knew also that John Orlebar, whom he met constantly at the Chaines', held the same view, and that he had great influence with Antonia.

Orlebar had always slightly puzzled Raby—he felt there was an undercurrent beneath his friendliness. How could he guess that at first sight of him Orlebar had noticed, with a slow shock of astonishment, the unusual colour of his eyes, and had instantly become vaguely apprehensive and watchful of his ward?

Meanwhile, Antonia's point of view of the situation was that she thought she had made of Raby a firm friend for life; that she would be able to summon him on the telephone whenever she needed him, that he would fly to her side whenever they chanced to meet.

She found that it was all quite different from what she had expected; as often as not Raby would refuse her invitations, giving no reason or excuse, and when they met at races or balls would probably spend far more time with some other woman than with her. It made her rather angry, piqued her, though she was far from showing it. She told herself that she knew he was in love with someone else, but she thought they had done enough things together to justify her in considering him a friend. Now he had made it impossible for her even to feel that.

And just as she was thinking of him rather bitterly Raby would suddenly do for her some thoughtful thing that nobody else had dreamt of. "There is such a crowd here," he said to her one day at a race-meeting, coming up for the first time; "I knew there would be this difficulty about carriages. I have your car waiting at the corner; if you will come now I will put you into it." Antonia, faint and weary with standing, followed him with intense relief.

Whenever there was any real need for him, he seemed to be always there, to save her from fatigue or worry or embarrassment or inconvenience. Antonia thought it was mere chance, she had a way of taking these services for granted; she didn't know that he was there because he was always watching her, always thinking of her, even while he seemed most indifferent and preoccupied.

Sometimes for a week or two he would come in and out of the house fairly frequently, would ask her to do this or that or the other. They would have good times together, spend long, delightful afternoons ; and then, again, for no apparent reason, she would never see him for a month, hear nothing of him.

This treatment of her made Antonia feel that she must fight him with his own weapons—there seemed to be no choice in the matter. Of course, she could have left him severely alone, dropped him out of her life, forgotten him, but that was the one thing in the world she could not do. Whatever he did or left undone, whatever his shortcomings and failings were, Antonia couldn't really forget him, or be indifferent to him—she could only pretend to be. She *did* pretend, although it didn't agree with her ; she was not a conscious coquette, nevertheless she flirted now with other people, refused to do many of the things he wanted her to do, would be " out " when she might have been " in," " in " when she might have been " out."

She set her wits to work to think of everything she could do that would be, to a man, the most baffling and perplexing, and when a woman of Antonia's elusive type does that, a will-o'-the-wisp wouldn't be able to follow her meanderings.

The last thing that ever occurred to Raby was the idea that the misleading statement he had made to Antonia about the other woman could possibly make any difference. To him it was just a dead leaf that would be swept along with the avalanche of their love when the moment of mutual discovery came. Raby was essentially a man with a contempt of detail and explanations—his thoughts were always on a large scale. As for Antonia—women, he knew, thought more

of details than men—well ! he would sweep the details away for them both when the right time came.

In a way he was satisfied with the position—as far as anyone can be satisfied when the only person he cares for belongs to someone else.

He was glad of this dummy-figure that stood between Antonia and himself. It made it possible for him to come and go in her house with perfect freedom. But for the dummy, he would have become merely her lap-dog, *or* he would have declared himself. Not only declared himself, but she would have had to make up her mind whether she was going with him, or whether he went alone. He didn't quite know what would happen if he had declared himself already ; he didn't understand her enough. He wanted to be sure of her, far more sure, at any rate, before this happened.

As for the lap-dog, no woman, he felt convinced, and certainly not Antonia, could have any respect for a lap-dog.

The dummy was an excellent device ; he was very satisfied with her, there was much useful service in her yet. They, Raby and Antonia, seemed to be eternally playing a game of " hide-and-seek "—if it wasn't *his* turn, it was *hers*, with here and there a lucid interval.

There was a lucid interval, for instance, when Raby got ill. He disappeared for a time, and it seemed he had been wandering in the Pyrenees. He had a way of wandering about other countries on his feet. Antonia asked him once how far he walked each day, and he said that sometimes he never got beyond the first field or the first vineyard outside the first village.

On this occasion there had been an extraordinary hail-storm—the sky had looked heavy and black for miles, with a blackness and a heaviness no one had ever

seen before. The shepherds and farmers thought something unusual was going to happen, and the wise ones hurried their sheep and cattle under cover as far as possible, Raby assisting to drive them in. He had thoroughly enjoyed it.

Then the hail had come, suddenly and swiftly, with a noise that was deafening—it is a fact that the stones were many of them as large as tennis balls. They battered down everything, these great lumps of frozen water—huts, trees, crops, tents—killing cattle in hundreds.

Raby had taken refuge behind a large tree, alone for the moment, but had been joined by two or three peasant women and children, shattered and hurt by their run across the open. In attending to them, he had got into the outer ring, had been considerably battered, one of the hailstones breaking his toe. He had neglected it, tied it up himself, even received rough medical treatment in the villages, but eventually had come back to England with blood-poisoning. Antonia went to see him often while he was laid up ; most days she wandered in for an hour or so, and always he begged her to come again if she could spare the time.

Raby ill was like Raby in Italy—simple, grateful for anything, gentle, kind, patient. Yet directly he got well again he seemed to change as he had changed before—only *seemed*, for really he didn't.

There was a wise man who said that " life was made up of moments."

How true it is that, looking back at the end of a long life, it must be a moment here, a moment there that springs to the memory, and stands for a biography. The breakfasts, dinners, walks, talks, and all the other humdrum everyday doings have long passed into the

twilight, and only a few moments stand out, vivid and distinct, from the blur of all the rest, even as a handful of withered, sweet-scented petals, pressed in the leaves of a book, are all that remain to testify to the birth and life and death of a rose.

It was very much like this with the doings of Antonia and Raby; a day-by-day diary would have been a useless, dull, dreary affair, and for every one step forward they would have appeared to take two steps back. But there were moments—moments like the return from Newmarket, a certain morning in Paris, the affair of the red button, and a few others, that were as stepping-stones across a river, each one carrying them both a little farther in the direction they were bound to go.

"Life is a brass chain," Antonia had once said when things appeared particularly black,—"common, sordid, yellow brass—that's all."

"A brass chain with jewels on it," Raby answered. "The jewels are the moments when one is happy."

"But they are so few and far apart."

"Then we must bring them closer till the chain is thick with jewels and the brass hardly shows at all."

Antonia turned away. "You know it can't be done."

"I know it *shall* be done—only you must help, Tonita."

CHAPTER XII

IT was in the following autumn that Antonia went down to stay in a house-party near Newmarket for the Second Autumn Meeting, arranging on the last day of the racing to leave the course by motor and proceed direct to London.

Raby Stigand had been to Newmarket also, travelling up and down from town each day ; Antonia had seen him many times in the distance, but hardly at all to speak to.

The last afternoon was wet and dreary, although the morning opened with brilliant sunshine. Antonia and Freddy Ramsden, somewhere near the end of the day, had taken refuge from the downpour on the grand-stand, Antonia feeling vaguely, without knowing why, that life wasn't so very amusing after all, and that the eternal round of pleasure was a sordid delusion.

Suddenly she heard Raby's voice beside her, rather cool and icy, but polite, addressing itself to a fat lady who stood just beneath her, a large green butterfly hat-pin of the cheap and nasty variety sticking out aggressively far from the erection on her head.

It came in a flash to Antonia that Raby's voice was what she had been needing to make the weather bearable.

" Madam, may I point out to you that the bee in your —hat—is entirely ruining this lady's dress ? " His expression, while well controlled, subtly conveyed a marked distaste for the object in question.

Antonia glanced, surprised, from Raby's face to her dress ; it was quite true what he said ; the gaudy green butterfly had evidently been out in the rain, and the colour from his wings had come off in one big smear on her pale grey sleeve. She was half annoyed, and half amused at Raby, who seemed to be considerably more annoyed about it than she was herself.

The fat lady eyed him with distrust, and was inclined to be resentful. She put up one bulgy hand and fondly patted the object in question to make sure it was still there, to the everlasting detriment of the tight white kid glove that wrinkled to her elbow. The sight of her hand, all patched with green, had a touch of comedy about it that added fuel to the fire, causing Antonia to smile inwardly.

" If you are speaking of the butterfly in my hat," she said severely, addressing herself to Raby, " it can't have spoilt your friend's sleeve, any more than her sleeve has spoilt my hatpin—rubbing all the colour off it," she added indignantly.

" We regret to have caused you any loss of—of—*effect*, madam," Raby said in the same voice ; and then, as she seemed to be unwilling to take any steps in the matter, he added, " Can I be of service in helping you to dislodge it ? "

She turned defiantly, thought better of it, and withdrew her gaze.

" I don't need any assistance ; I can do it myself," she said shortly, and drawing the pin out with a jerk, from the side near Antonia, she planted it in the other side where there was nothing but the air to come into contact and disagree with it.

" Thank you," Raby said politely, and turned away as if the incident had now come to a satisfactory

conclusion. "Tonita—has it spoilt your dress for ever? How sickening—I liked that one. What horse have you backed? If it rolls home we might be able to afford a new sleeve."

Antonia felt suddenly quite amused and happy; the trivial incident had cheered up her afternoon wonderfully. Why wasn't Raby always there to take care of her? She liked it; she was pleased that he had minded so much about the other woman being tiresome.

"When do you go back to town?" Raby asked, the glasses up to his eyes, trying to focus the start.

"Straight away from here."

"In the motor?"

"Yes."

"Would you like to take me with you, or is it more than you can bear?"

"I think I can bear it—but don't let me upset any plans."

"Plans! I never have any."

The race over, Antonia said good-bye to host and hostess, and together she and Raby found their way out into the carriage enclosure to pick up the motor.

Daisy Post, who had been very happy with Raby that day, watched them go curiously, a queer pain somewhere in her anatomy. The relationship between herself and him had been changing subtly the last few months; he had taken much less interest in her physically and more mentally. He still admired her, of course, would sometimes praise her person and invariably commend her dress—but then Raby could never have gone about with any woman without noticing details of that sort about her. He thought she was the neatest woman he had ever seen; everything was natty about her, her hair, her collars, her

shoes, her house, everything that was hers—she couldn't help it, it was a gift.

For a long time now they had been only friends—the sort of friendliness that has a snap in it, making just the difference between pals of the same sex and pals of the opposite. Raby had had intervals of this friendliness before, but it had never lasted as long as this. However, Mrs. Post was far too wise to try and force any situation ; indeed, she took the present state of things as a good and hopeful sign. She thought she was becoming necessary to him—a habit ; and she was happier, because, though perhaps he took her more calmly, was less enthralled by her physical attractions, on the other hand he was more thoughtful and considerate, far less off-hand and casual. The real crux of the matter was that she cared for him so much that she didn't mind how she got him, or on what terms, as long as she *did* get him, and what she hoped for was that in the end, *faute de mieux*, he would marry her. She had no delusions about it, she knew he would never be in love with her, but she thought that if he found nothing better, they would get along very well.

She knew that he thought her very unexacting, and appreciated the quality in her considerably. In this he was deceived ; she was by nature very exacting, but she had the wit to know it wouldn't pay with Raby. So she never tried to hold him, never asked questions, never pried into his doings, welcomed him when he turned up, appeared not to regret him when he went away. Nobody could have played a difficult game more tactfully.

One thing she counted on was that the intimate knowledge they had of each other would be no bar to marriage, and in this she was right. If fate chose to

ordain it, their intimacy would certainly have been in her favour in Raby's eyes—not against her.

But to-day as she watched him go away with Antonia her eyes sharpened to see the shadow of a shadow; it seemed to her that Raby, usually so unyielding and self-sufficient in his bearing, looked smaller somehow, and a shade less confident as he followed Antonia, her coat over his arm. She knew, by experience, that love makes even the proudest of us humble—what if it had happened to him?

Nobody else in the world would have seen what she saw; in fact, practically it was not there to be seen at all—it was merely woman's intuition, born of love.

"Mrs. Adam Chaine," she said to herself, "that's just the sort of woman it would be." In a second her imagination was backing up her instinct; she was seeing fresh charms, new virtues, untold graces in Antonia.

While her instinct warned her of the danger, her intelligence struggled to deny it. She refused to believe it because she didn't want to believe it, but, nevertheless, the seed had been sown, and would bear fruit in due season.

Raby and Antonia, meanwhile, on the high road to London, each leaning back in their separate corners of Antonia's landaulet, spoke little at first, and of indifferent subjects—it wasn't a bit necessary for them to make conversation to each other. Antonia babbled gently, off and on, about mutual friends and their doings, and of the horses she had or hadn't backed, Raby commenting monosyllabically, and watching her out of the tail of his eye while he contemplated wildly telling the chauffeur to drive on for ever, or to stop only when he came to some blessed spot where Antonia and he could be alone, with Adam and the house in St. James's

Square, and all the other odious ties in life blotted out for always.

But the result of his musing was that he became, if possible, rather more terse than usual.

"I'm suffering," he said plaintively, a little later, pulling up the collar of his coat.

"Suffering?" Antonia said, quite unconcerned.

"Yes—my hands are cold."

"What nonsense."

"Yes, they are," eyeing her muff affectionately, "they really are awfully cold."

"I don't care a bit if they are," Antonia laughed.

"I thought perhaps you'd give me a portion of your muff."

"The very last thing I shall do!—I want it all myself."

There was nothing lover-like in these remarks of his; they were perfectly innocent, perfectly harmless—it was the harmlessness of them that annoyed and piqued Antonia even while she laughed.

Raby only said them to be frivolous and naughty and teasing—obviously it was not thus that a man spoke to a woman he really loved, not in that way that he would have touched her hand for the first time. And because he cared so much, because he wanted to touch her so badly, and couldn't, he adopted that tone to hide his hurt. But Antonia couldn't know this, couldn't guess it.

It was in Whitechapel that a tyre went, and they pulled up in a ring of light, cast down by a gaunt and dreary-looking street lamp.

"What a nuisance!" Antonia said, as the chauffeur got to work, removing his top-coat. "*I'm* suffering now; I did want to get home."

"How ? "

"My feet are cold."

Raby opened the door and got out. He crossed the road and disappeared into a chemist's shop, reappearing in a few minutes with a rubber hot-bottle filled with boiling water.

"Ah ! " Antonia said ungratefully, "you are only trying to heap coals of fire on my head because of the muff. Why do you bother about my feet ? "

Raby wrapped the bottle in a rug and laid it snugly across her two insteps.

"Because they are worth a certain amount of attention." He climbed in again, and they sat in silence.

Gradually a knot of people had collected, watching the tyre manœuvres. It was a cold, drizzly, thoroughly miserable London evening ; Raby and Antonia, wishing for as much air as possible, had let down the back of the landaulet, and sat there protected from the rain by the hood in front.

The faces about them made a ring of sadness round the motor—they were more or less hopeless, sodden, joyless, damp, down-trodden, some ill, some faintly insolent in expression, some cunning, some vacant, all dreary, all sufferers, with an intimate knowledge of life's seamiest side, the dirty, miserable little shops and houses behind them, and the drizzling fall of rain and smuts above and around them, making a fitting atmosphere and environment.

Raby, looking round with observant eyes, caught a glimpse of a little pot of something evergreen, growing, actually growing, despite its surroundings, on a tiny grey, desolate window-sill over his head. A thought struck him.

"Tonita—put up your veil," he said suddenly.

She looked at him surprised.

"Why?"

"Why? Do you see that pot?" pointing to the evergreen. "What do you suppose it's for? what is the meaning of it there?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," Antonia said doubtfully, "except perhaps it does some poor person good to look at it, here among all these sordid horrors."

"Exactly—that's why I ask you to put up your veil. Look at these people—they never see anything nice or sweet or beautiful—please be quick."

His compliments were rare, and always indirect.

"It *is* such nonsense, Raby."

"Please do." He was determined to get his own way.

Antonia began slowly to draw off her gloves—it seemed useless trying to resist him.

Raby watched her anxiously—he hoped above everything that she would not be wearing rings; it would just spoil the effect of everything. He wanted these people to see a bit of nature's handiwork, not the glitter of things that might be bought in the shops they could never enter.

"Perfect!" he said, as Antonia's bare hands disclosed themselves.

"Why?"

"No glitters, thank the Lord, only a tiny posy ring."

If Antonia heard, she failed to catch his meaning.

The next minute a slight, almost inaudible sound went up from the group as she rolled up her veil. Slight as it was, it was quite unmistakable—a sudden quickening of interest, a wave of movement.

"There!" Raby said, "didn't I tell you?"

She didn't answer, but turned to look at him, and in that moment, as their eyes met, she knew positively that Raby had some sort of definite feeling for her. It might be very far from the highest grade of sentiment, but such as it was, it was there; she had touched him somehow, he was not altogether unmoved by her. For a second or two they looked at each other, both of them thinking the same thing—then Antonia turned quickly away, before the impulse to say "yes" became too strong for her. For the hundredth time in their intercourse, she told herself that she would not be merely an episode in his life while the other woman, the real woman, got all the best of everything.

But since she and Raby were philanthropically intent that night, if they had only done the thing they wanted to do and trusted to luck, it might have amused the people more than anything—or perhaps it wouldn't have? Perhaps it would have made them feel more out of it, more in the mud, farther away from Paradise than ever—there is no knowing.

"She ain't married," a woman's voice in the circle was heard to say a moment later; "it ain't a wedding-ring."

As a matter of fact, Antonia never wore her wedding-ring, because Adam said it was an ugly relic of barbarism.

"No," a man chimed in, "she must be engiged to the feller."

"It would have to be a very short engagement," Raby's voice growled from the depths of his turned-up collar.

"Why?"

"Because I shouldn't want to wait," he answered bluntly. "What's the good of waiting? If you had

done me the honour of engaging yourself to me, I should return the compliment by making you marry me without further delay." Antonia said nothing, and Raby's voice began again, changed and playful.

"How long would it take you, Tonita?"

"Long enough to get a trousseau," Antonia answered in the same spirit.

"Trousseau—what rubbish! You have everything in the world already."

"Yes, but perhaps it hasn't occurred to you that I might like them to be new."

"I see—have finished with all the old associations. Yes! there's something in that. Well, then, I expect you would have to leave them all behind and go away without any. I can't think that anything would be wanted, except yourself."

"A charming idea, but modern life isn't as simple as that, except on a desert island."

"Then let's find one."

Antonia yawned ever so slightly on purpose. "I believe it would bore me."

"I don't think it would; I'd see that it didn't."

Again they looked at each other, and then a woman's voice breaking in, shivered the moment and all it held into a thousand little pieces.

"'E must be engiged to the lidy." This time the voice came from the other side of the circle.

In the momentary interval that followed, Raby took a grip of himself; in modern vernacular, he "pulled up his socks."

"They all seem to have the same original idea," he said cynically; "the respectability of it appals me!"

"Think!" Antonia said gently, "these people, even these, are groping blindly for romance, and you and I

serve as pegs to hang it on just for the moment. Don't you think it's pathetic, Raby ? "

But Raby's grip on his feelings had, as always, the effect of sharpening his tongue.

" Yet they seem hideously anxious to marry us, don't they ?—and romance and marriage never go hand in hand, so I'm told."

The tyre accomplished, the chaffeur and the footman climbed in again, the little circle opened to let them pass out, and the motor and its occupants moved on towards the West.

But Antonia was pondering more on some sort of continuation of the subject they had been discussing than on what Raby had said.

" If I were married "—she began slowly—" but how silly, for of course I *am !* " She laughed with genuine amusement.

" Never mind—what were you thinking of ? "

" I suppose I was thinking if I was going to marry someone else—I can't think what else it could have been."

" What an immoral idea ! " Raby said lightly, " I can't let you have two husbands. Who would think, to look at you, that you are a bigamist at heart, Tonita ! "

A minute later he asked to be put down in the Haymarket, disappearing in the direction of his rooms in Pall Mall, with a single word of farewell—and it was three weeks before she saw him again, after which they met casually and conventionally at a play-party, and a dinner, neither of which encounters in itself carried them any farther or gave them any satisfaction.

Only the things they had said and looked and felt the day of the return from Newmarket were reviewed in

their thoughts of each other over and over again, a million and one times.

It was about Christmas-time that they both stayed in the same house-party from Friday to Tuesday for two days' shooting. On Saturday the weather had been very bad, a high wind and torrents of rain, so that the guns had knocked off at lunch time and returned to the house. After only half a day's work and the prospect of doing nothing on the morrow, the British sportsmen that evening were more energetic and playful and frivolous than they are generally wont to be after a really hard day.

Indeed, they showed signs of a decided tendency to toy with the weaker sex, and members of the house-party, both male and female, decided between themselves that a fancy dress dinner would be very amusing, to be followed by a dance—the dresses to be made up in the house out of materials at hand.

Everybody threw themselves into the spirit of the thing with zest, and made a success of it; there appeared down one after the other a cowboy and a lady from Maxim's, a clown and a Spanish dancer, a coon and a dear little lady who looked perfectly charming as an artist, in a blue velvet smoking suit with a large bow tie; then came Mary and her lamb, the lamb looking remarkably like the smoking-room hearth-rug, a Bacchante, a lamp-shade, and several others.

Antonia, last down, came as an Apache. Her hair was drawn plainly back over her ears and twisted into a knot; she had a black dress, a scarlet handkerchief tied round her neck, and a red rose in her mouth. She had never looked more beautiful in her life; everybody thought so, including Raby. The plainness of her hair and utter want of adornment in her dress seemed to

show up the very real perfection of her features and figure, and, perhaps fired by the appreciation she evoked, she made a little character-study of the part, managing subtly to convey the idea of a creature half-shy, half-savage, at once man's enemy and his ally and slave.

It was cleverly done, it suited her type—it suited *her*.

On the right-hand side of her bodice had been sewn a large round red button.

"Antonia," everybody shrieked at once, "what is the red button for?"

They were all tremendously *intrigué*.

She only laughed, shaking back her hair, and glancing round for Raby found that he was dressed in corduroy trousers, striped sweater, black coat, red scarf knotted round his neck, and peaked cap—presumably an Apache, too. There had been no consultation about the dresses beforehand.

After dinner the party adjourned to the gallery, most of them in very good mood for dancing. Things had not been going well for Raby and Antonia that day; Raby had been terse, Antonia vague and off-hand. She was recklessly determined to avoid him this evening, to sit about in corners and refrain from taking an active part in the merrymaking.

But half-way through she found him standing before her.

"Are you going to give me a dance?"

"Are you going to ask me?"

"Isn't that rather absurd?"—carelessly—"I like your button."

"Yes, it's quite attractive—a little notion I saw in Paris. You don't ask me what it's for?"

"No—because I know."

"What is it for?"

Raby looked her in the eyes. "It's for the Apache who looks after you, the man you belong to, to catch hold of you by when he wants you—quick."

Antonia laughed sharply. "How did you know?"

"Isn't it obvious?"

Suddenly he pulled her roughly into his arms. "Come and dance. I'm the only man-Apache here to-night, the only one there's going to be."

The others, who saw the action, laughed — they thought Raby was acting the part, as he had meant them to think if they looked that way.

Antonia laughed too, a catch in her throat. It was the first caress, the only one, Raby had ever given her. It *was* a caress she knew, let those smile who like.

"Don't!" she said. "How rough you are! Look! you've nearly torn off my precious red button. I wouldn't lose it for anything."

He loosened her just enough to look at the button, and then folded her close to him again, laughing with a shade of triumph.

"It's very *chic*—but, after all, wasn't it meant for me? I'm the only Apache here."

Antonia was angry. "No—certainly it wasn't. You are perfectly impossible——"

"Please don't get angry—does it ever matter what I say? You shouldn't take me seriously."

"I shouldn't dream of it—still, it's a pity someone doesn't take enough interest in you to bring you to a sense of your own unwar-r-antable" (she stumbled over the word, laughing) "conceit."

"That's a very long speech for you. No one does, you see; I'm left to work out my own salvation."

The hostess, a little Dresden-china sort of person,

came dancing round towing her partner by the hand ; she was collecting couples for a set of Lancers.

" Will you two dance it ? " she said to Raby and Antonia.

" Don't make us, lady," Raby said, shaking his head.

She smiled at Antonia and pushed in a hairpin. " Doesn't she look sweet ? " addressing Raby.

" A perfect darlin'." Darling was the only word in the English language from which he clipped the " g " ; it seemed, somehow, to make it more caressing.

" Don't you love her in that get-up ? "

" Love her ? I'm crazy about her. I want to beat her."

" Kind of you ! "

" I want to pull her hair down, knock her about, and finally carry her off in my arms. It's a good thing I watched it at the Café de la Lune, I know just what to do."

" Don't be so ridiculous."

" But I mean it."

The hostess laughed indulgently and passed on ; she hadn't taken him in the least seriously.

" Raby, how can you talk such nonsense ? " Antonia said.

Raby was perfectly grave. " I like telling the truth right under their noses," he said, " they never believe it."

" Thanks—then you want to hurt me ? "

" I should love it," he was watching the Lancers. " Hooray ! they are complete without us ; come and sit down, I want to talk to you." It was evident that, having secured her, he did not mean to let her go again.

They went into a side room, and through the folding-doors watched the dancing.

"Rosie Lafone looks very well to-night, doesn't she?" Raby said. Mrs. Lafone was the lady in the artist's dress.

"Yes."

"She always looks charming; she understands the art of dressing nearly as well as you do."

"It almost shocks me that a man should understand woman's dress as *you* do," Antonia replied. "I always thought an Englishman never could; he is too much of a man."

"Perhaps—but I can't help my great gifts. Besides, the man who understands woman's dress to the point of knowing where it is wrong, must no doubt have a number of other charming qualities involved."

"Such as?"

"Well! he must be an artist—non-creative if you will—a pioneer, an idealist, a dreamer of dreams, a lover of your charming sex." Raby was laughing at his outrageous statements.

A light like a small white blaze crept up into Antonia's eyes. "He must be a cynic and a despot, a double-dealer and a turncoat, with the soul of a Chinese torturer," she said. "He cares nothing for us or our comfort or our feelings, but only for *how we look*. Yes! I can see now very well why you understand these things—you have the necessary qualifications."

Raby laughed—he was delighted. He adored Antonia when she was roused, adored the light in her eyes.

"So I have the soul of a Chinese torturer?"

"Yes—you have. I have always known it."

"Because I care how you look?"

"Yes."

"Good. But I shall continue to care, and look too. Especially at you."

Antonia shrugged her shoulders petulantly. "I suppose I can't prevent it."

The Lancers over, one of the house-party sat down and began improvising at the piano, turning all the well-known household tunes into waltzes and two-steps, running them serenely one into the other, from "Three blind mice" to "Pop goes the Weasel."

"What are little girls made of?" Raby hummed to the music, as the player at the piano descended lightly and airily as a bird on the well-known air.

"Well—what are they?" Antonia said, her eyelashes giving their unconsciously naughty twist.

"I don't know—I only know what one of them appears to me to be made of."

"What is that?"

"Varied ingredients."

"Which ones?"

He leant back, crossing one leg over his knee, his head against the wall, his peaked cap between his brown fingers.

"Take the repose of a sphinx, the flash of distant lightning, the arts and crafts and wiles of a Sultana, several germs of the unexpected, an innocent English summer day, a Viennese waltz, the treachery of an Apache who stabs you in the back when you aren't looking—mix the whole thing up together, put into the mixture two eyes that hold in them the sleepiness of the droning of bees in the summer——

Antonia raised her eyes to his.

"It sounds very fascinating."

"It is."

"And it exists?"

"It does."

There was a moment's pause.

"Then it ought to make you miserable," Antonia said.

"Why?"

"Because you can't have it."

Raby laughed. "There's no such word as 'can't.' It does its best—it tries very hard to give me a bad time—did you ever know a fascination who didn't?"

"Does it succeed?"

Raby thought a minute, and then laughed again. "No—at least, not yet."

Through the open doors Antonia allowed herself to catch the eye of a friend who made signs of wanting her to dance—she nodded acquiescence.

"Shall I tell you what little boys are made of?" she said, rising to her feet.

"Yes, do." They were looking in each other's eyes, attentively.

Suddenly a smile crept into Antonia's; she looked down at the rose in her buttonhole and put it in her mouth.

"The same old things," she said, with a ripple of laughter.

"How do you mean?"

The other man had arrived to take possession of her; she moved away with him, looking over her shoulder at Raby, and laughing.

"Only frogs and snails and puppy-dogs' tails," she said indistinctly, the rose between her lips.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was some time in January that Adam painted a portrait of Narmi, the great Italian actress. He was tremendously interested in the picture, but the woman herself was a constant source of irritation to him. She would come dressed in the wrong clothes, or she would fail to keep her appointment, or at the end of a quarter of an hour she would declare that her whole body had gone to sleep, and that sitting still a moment longer was out of the question; or, again, for a change, she would be an angel—patient, tractable, tireless.

It happened one afternoon that she took it into her head to come an hour too early. Adam had been working all the morning, and had chosen this particular moment to have lunch.

Antonia, Susan Wing, Raby, and Freddy Ramsden, who had already lunched, were talking and smoking in Antonia's sitting-room when Adam appeared in their midst.

"Antonia," he said, after shaking hands all round, "Madame Narmi has come an hour before her appointment; I haven't had my lunch yet, but I don't want her to go away. Unless you have something important to do, couldn't you go in and talk to her?"

"Yes, I can quite well; I am not doing anything particular. What sort of mood is she in?"

Antonia, while admiring her enormously as an actress, had not met her in her private capacity, though she had heard much of her eccentricities from Adam.

"I don't know at all," Adam replied grimly. "Thank you very much if you will go and look after her. When I have had some food I will appear."

He said good-bye and went away, closing the door behind him.

"I wish you would all come too," Antonia said, looking round. "I don't particularly want an hour of her alone. Adam always takes an hour over lunch; he won't hurry."

"Oh, what a pity!" Susan Wing cried regretfully. "I should love to have met her, but I can't, darling. My small son must be already waiting for me in the motor; I'm going to spend the afternoon with him at his tailors, Messrs. Wears and Swells."

"Well, you will, Raby?"

"All right."

"And you, Freddy?"

"I can't, I'm sorry to say. I'm catching the 3.15 from King's Cross."

Together Raby and Antonia went down to the studio. Narmi was sitting by the fire, an open letter in her hand, a bundle of correspondence in her lap. She laughed and rose as they entered, the letters flying in every direction.

"How do you do?" Antonia said, advancing to meet her. "My husband is so sorry, but he has not yet finished lunch. I do not think he will be long. Do you know Mr. Stigand, Madame Narmi?"

Raby shook hands, and then scrambled about, rescuing the correspondence.

"I have not minded to wait at all," Narmi said in charmingly broken though fluent English; "it gives me a moment for my correspondence. My secretary is ill—after twenty years of faithful service she has contracted mumps. What do you think of it?"

"My sympathies are all with her—I should hate to have it," Antonia replied feelingly.

"And mine with you, Madame," Raby said. "What a lot of letters!" He laughed, placing the packet in her hand.

"Thank you for both—the sympathy and the letters," she smiled at him, and turned to Antonia. "Your husband—he is well?"

"Adam is always well," Antonia said, surprised; "I have never known him anything else."

"Ah!" Narmi was fixing her eyes on Antonia; it was curious that she made no comment. "And what is it like to be the wife of a great artist, Madame?"

"It is very interesting," Antonia said, a trifle frigidly. Raby saw there was something about this woman that kept her undecided, intuitively unfriendly. Antonia was making up her mind about her. He watched, amused.

"It must be," Narmi replied, "almost as interesting as being a great artist yourself."

Antonia smiled. "I wonder if you would find it so."

Again Narmi looked at her sharply; undoubtedly, either pleasantly or unpleasantly, these women were interested in each other.

"Your face remembers to me someone. We have never met before, is it not so? I wonder, who can it be?"

"I wonder," Antonia said carelessly. "Your face of course, I know quite well. I saw you in Paris, playing 'Tosca,' two years ago."

For the next few minutes they discussed plays and players, giving Raby ample time to study the visitor's appearance. At forty-seven years of age Narmi was still a beautiful and interesting-looking woman, her jet-

black hair parted down the middle and drawn over her ears into a knot at the back, her skin cool and pale and fresh-looking, her lips red, her teeth white and even. Only her eyes, and round her eyes, gave any clue to her age, and sometimes the expression in them would be as mischievous as that of a girl of seventeen. But other times they looked heavy with sorrow, dark with regrets, as if they had wept a sea of tears. It was the face of a woman who had led a very emotional life.

Suddenly Adam's dog got out of her basket and walked across to the door—a strange-looking animal, rather like a miniature hyena, small and brown with a short coat and a tail that curled up over its back. It was a Iam-Iam dog, which had been brought straight from the Iam-Iams, a tribe of cannibals in the heart of Africa, with whom the breeding of these dogs was almost a religion, so pure they kept it. Narmi was enchanted ; she rose from her chair, and crept across to it insinuatingly.

" I'm afraid it's no use," Antonia said, after watching one or two unsuccessful efforts to approach. " They are extraordinary dogs, unlike any others. This one is quite wild really, a savage at heart. It has only one friend in the world—my husband."

" What is its name ? "

" Adam christened her ' Eve,' " Antonia said laughing. " I call her his affinity."

" She costs Adam a small fortune in the country," Raby remarked.

" Why ? " Narmi said, still on her hands and knees.

" She lays out a whole farmyard dead as a door-nail in about five minutes, including the retriever and the sheep-dog."

Narmi sat up. " I adore a savage," she said, address-

ing herself to Raby. "I wish she were mine—that leetle dog. Perhaps she could tell me things about her country that I have wanted to know half my life; could whisper in my ear the secret of its fascination."

Raby laughed. "I know it pretty well," he said, "and I think I could make myself understood better than Eve. You had better ask me. Why does it appeal to you particularly?"

"Perhaps because a friend of mine, my greatest friend, loved it and died there. But that is twenty-two years ago, when I was young. To-day, in spite of my old age, stories from Africa still read to me like stories of the 'Never-never-land' read to a child."

Raby was sympathetic—he liked her. He thought he had never seen a woman with such extraordinarily expressive brown eyes. "You should go there on a shooting-trip—so many ladies do now. That is the way to see the country."

"Perhaps I may—but not to kill. For me, I should go for the camping experiences and to see and suffer the great loneliness."

"If I went I should want to try and kill something," Antonia said slowly.

Raby was watching Narmi; he saw her turn quickly and look at Antonia.

"Who were you before you were married?" she said abruptly, breaking into French, and her voice had the ring of one who is within her rights in demanding an answer.

Antonia was plainly surprised; she moved her shoulders, and arranged a cushion behind her back without undue haste.

"My name was Hext," she said coldly.

Narmi sat perfectly motionless on the floor for half a minute, the dog forgotten ; and then she rose and went back to her chair. She sat down heavily, as one lost in thought.

" Is it possible ? " she said slowly, " is it possible ? Yet, of course !—the same eyes, the same voice, the same way of speaking, of saying ' kill.' "

Antonia began to be interested, in spite of herself. " Why should my name surprise you, Madame ? "

" Only for this reason, that I knew your father and mother before you were born."

" Really ? " Antonia sprang up and went over and sat beside her, taking her hand. " When ? Where ? Do tell me about it. I remember my father slightly, but my mother died when I was born. I have always wanted to hear more about her."

Narmi's eyes never left her face—she was curiously still and controlled.

" My child—but have they not told you of her ? "

Raby had a sort of impression that she was speaking at random to gain time, to collect her thoughts.

" Oh yes, they have, but not much. I have met so few people who knew her. Father was very interesting, I know, but grandmother's and Uncle Jack's description of my mother always gave me the idea that she must have been rather dull. They don't mean to, of course, and I know it's an awful thing to say—but I should like to have the impression removed. Was she dull ? "

Narmi laughed a trifle strangely. " I think I can promise you that she was not dull. But I must not mislead you. When I said I knew your father and mother, I did not say I knew them well. On the contrary, I knew them very slightly, but as they chanced

to be mixed up with a certain part of my life, I have never forgotten."

"Will you tell us about it?" Antonia said gently, stroking the hand she held.

Narmi's low laugh rang through the room.

"It would be strange," she said, still speaking in French, "if I parted with a secret twenty-two years old this afternoon, just because you ask me, would it not? Yet why not? At my age one does not care; and besides, who knows, you may treat my story gently, even as one treats an old bundle of letters tied with blue ribbon, discovered in some drawer, long since unused."

She looked down at Antonia's hand, laid it flat on her own, examining its shape and size and whiteness. It seemed to help her to decide.

She settled herself into her chair, crossing her hands in her lap. "Listen, then—and you too," turning to Raby, who would have gone quietly out of the room, "for it may interest you also if I tell you my story. But I must continue thus in French, for my English is not equal to the task.

"You may have heard that I have been the mistress of Fouquet and Jaumont and Bardelaix, and others of equal note. Of some it is true, of others not. They say also that I have never married, but this is false. I married when I was twenty-four, though no one has ever known. But wait, I go too fast. You must know that I was a Venetian, my father of an old and noble Venetian family, my mother a dancer. From my convent I ran away to the theatre; how I got on and succeeded is another story, but I *did* succeed. My heart was bound up in my work, I was in the front rank of my profession, when I fell in love with an Englishman I met in Paris. 'Fell in love,' I sit here and say calmly;

it was more than that—it was a fever, a tornado. I have always said that if Englishmen, with their good looks and splendid characteristics, could have a dash of warm southern blood in them—then we should have the perfect man. Alas! it is rare; nevertheless, my husband was one of these. He had the charm and recklessness of the devil, inextricably mixed up with something strong and straight and clean. He began his life in the English Guards, and left to take up one appointment after another with a wonderful success, gained by his capabilities and his personal popularity. Ah! but he was a terrible person for a woman to fall in love with—he was always in danger. If it were not wild beasts and savages or fever, then it was a duel in Paris; if not a duel, then hunting in England, reckless riding, falls, concussions; if not that, some secret service mission full of dangers—he was never still; I went through it all. I was madly in love with him; I wanted to be his mistress, but he would not have it so. He loved me so much he wanted to marry me, would hear of no other relationship. I refused to be tied, so he thrust me aside, resisting with a force I could not understand every temptation I put in his way. I wanted to keep my art and have him too, and he wanted me to give up my profession. Still I continued to be in love with him; it raged like a fever. I could not act, I could not sleep, my work was worse than bad. Then I heard he was living with another woman. I went to him, burning with rage and despair, and threatened to take her life. Later he heard that I was the mistress of Sey; it was not true, but he believed it for the moment. He came to me—shall I ever forget the scene that followed? I thought he would have killed me. At last we found it could not go on like this, the life was

wearing us out. Always we were crossing each other's paths, flying at each other's throats. We made a compromise. I would marry him and leave the stage for two years, but if at the end of that time I found the call of my profession was too strong for me, that I had to go back—then he would step aside and out of my life, leaving me free to pursue it. I knew that he would keep his word. He made only one stipulation : if I had a child, then my marriage could not be kept secret or disregarded. I promised this with ease ; I was mad for love of him ; I could think of nothing else.

" I told my managers that I was ill, broken in nerve, that I should take a long holiday. They were glad for my sake ; they thought it was what I needed. We were married secretly in Paris, and left immediately on our honeymoon. For one year I thought of nothing but love ; I was content to live with him in a villa in Southern Italy, thinking of, seeing no one but him. We sailed boats and made our garden beautiful ; for me the life was full enough, my only fear being that his restlessness would come back to him again.

" It was the beginning of the second year that he received letters from England, offering him the leadership of a certain expedition to Africa. From that time I noticed that he had changed—not in affection, for that could never be—but he had become unhappy, would have long hours of thoughtfulness and morbid silence. I knew what it was ; he wished to go, he was eating his heart out basking lazily in the Italian sunshine—for it seems that once a man has been outside the pale of civilization, he must go again and again—it is the call of the wild.

" After a month of seeing him like this, I released him myself. I sent him away, saying that I would wait

for him till he came back. No one knows what I went through ; it's awful to want someone who isn't there, to stretch out arms to emptiness, to call a name and receive back only silence.

" I felt ill too, just about then, miserably ill. I attributed my loss of health to grief. At last, to distract myself, I dragged out some of my old plays and read them up again, acting the parts. I wrote for new ones, and learnt them, it was the only thing that gave me the relief I sought.

" About one month after my husband's departure, the truth of my ill-health dawned on me. I was going to have a child. It made me furious—furious that I had been deserted, furious that I had been captured and entrapped. I acted my parts with increasing emotion, I threw myself about, knocking my head on the floor. I was determined, if possible, to put an end to my condition. And then, one day, a beggar came to me in the street and asked for money—he was maimed and horrible. I spoke to him, fascinated and horrified ; I asked him how he came to be in his present dreadful condition. He told me that he had been *born* like it.

" That night I went home and nearly died of terror. Suppose that I had a terrible child like that, suppose that God punished me thus for my ill-treatment of my body. I was crazy with terror, and there was no one to offer any consolation.

" Next morning I went to interview a doctor ; he reassured me somewhat. A little later on, he said, it would probably have been fatal, but so early I might well have done no harm.

" I came home determined to be brave and calm ; there was a letter waiting for me from my manager,

enclosing a new play, which, if my health was recovered, he declared would give me the opportunity of my life. I tore it open and read it; there was something about that play which made a crisis in my life. It fired my veins, my ambition, everything—it brought back to me my old passionate longings that had only been slumbering for a while.

"At the end of the reading my mind was made up—I should have to go back to the stage. Further, I knew what I meant to do. I was going to keep from my husband all news of the child, and when it was born I meant to desert it. It sounds wicked, does it not? It *was* wicked—but this is not a story of virtue; it is one of plain facts about part of my life, with no excuse or extenuation.

"I was convinced now that my art was more to me than anything else in the world—the only thing that could hold me to the end.

"When my mind was entirely made up I remembered the child; I sank on my knees, offering up a prayer and a vow.

"I prayed above everything else that the child should be a girl—it would make my sin so much less wicked—or appear so to me. For a boy would seem to demand his birthright, his chance in life, the advantages which are his natural due and right—but a girl is different. Women have a strange way of falling on their feet and finding their own level, even through every disadvantage; sometimes even their disadvantages are in their favour. This then was my prayer—for a girl-child. My vow to God was that the next few months should be devoted by me to the perfection of my child, in so far as was in my power. I meant it to be beautiful and healthy. What I should do with it, where

place it after it was born, I had no idea as yet; but I felt that if a woman is only beautiful enough, she ought to be able to move mountains. And—do not laugh at my strange beliefs—but every day I prayed to the Keeper of Souls that when he breathed the soul into my baby, he would breathe into her some soul that was not destined to be lonely, but whose fate it was to find its twin, whose time had come to reach completion.

"I realized that, charming as my Italian villa was, I must get away from it; it was too full of memories and associations. I negotiated for a villa in Algiers, and we moved there, my old nurse and I.

"From that day I devoted myself to my child; she was to have long black hair like mine, in waves below her knees, and blue eyes like her father's—eyes that held in them the sleepiness of the buzzing of insects in the sun. So every day I wore my hair down in order to play with it and keep it ever in my memory, while her father's eyes I would match up from remembrance with flowers and bits of the sky. From everything ugly I shut myself away, making the approach of it impossible, and on everything beautiful I fixed my attention, doing nothing else with the long days and nights. My garden was a chaos of colour: bougainvilleas, japonicas, iris, lilies, jasmine; I steeped myself in sunshine, lying about for hours gazing at a rose in my hand, or stroking a purple pansy. It is extraordinary how the time will pass if you concentrate on beauty. I lay still whole afternoons and evenings, listening to the fountains' tinkle, and watching the shadows creep up and lengthen and grow purple, while the sky turned into colours of magic. And at night I wandered through the gardens, under the stars, turning up here and there the face of a blossom; or sometimes a

magnificent Arab boy, in a purple and gold dress, a crimson turban wound round his head, would come and sing Arab songs to me, accompanying himself on a stringed instrument. I wanted her, girl though she might be, to have the low, deep, rich, melodious voice of that Arab boy.

"I led a life of absorption—absorbing the heat, and colour, and fragrance of the East."

She pushed back her hair, and folded one hand over the other; there was a little pause.

"And every day I prayed to the Keeper of Souls, for the soul that was not lonely to enter the body with which I had had something to do."

Her voice died away in a final cadence, as if, for herself at any rate, she had come to the end of her story.

Raby and Antonia moved in their seats, breaking the silence; they had been listening, interested to the last degree; they were impatient to hear the end of it.

"And then what happened?" Antonia said gently. "We are longing to hear the rest."

Narmi came out of her thoughts, as it were, and looked at her. "The end!" she said in a different voice. "The end of it was that after a year abroad, my husband came back and found me in Paris. But by that time I was deep in my play; I had returned to my profession. I told him that our two years were over, and I could not give up my art—that it was more to me than anything else in the world. I held him to his promise, and he did not fail, as I knew he would not. We had one scene which I shall remember to the end of my life, and then he went away, saying that one day I should surely want him again. He went back to Africa, and there he died."

" Yes," Antonia said breathlessly, " but the child—what of the child ? "

Narmi rose abruptly, and she laughed : " The child ! —oh, the child died ! I wonder why I have told you all these things. It was in Algiers I met your father and mother, Mrs. Chaine ; they were very kind to me. I think that must be why I told you." She stopped, and then, as an afterthought, added : " What name did your father give you ? I have often wondered."

" Antonia."

" And what is yours, Madame ? " Raby said, quick as thought.

" Curiously enough, it is Antonia too."

" I have often wondered," Antonia said slowly, " where father got the idea."

Narmi seemed vaguely to be collecting her things.

" You are not going ? " Antonia interposed anxiously. " My husband will be so disappointed."

" Alas, yes ! I am obliged. One hour I gave to my portrait this afternoon—it has almost gone."

" I'm afraid you were a little early."

" Is that so ? Then I must have forgotten." She came over and stood in front of Antonia. " You, the only woman to whom I have told my story, tell me—what do you think of it ? Oh ! I know you are not fitted to judge, you know nothing of the vagabond life that is outside most of the social laws ; for that reason I value your opinion—how bad do you think me ? "

Antonia took her hand. " Bad ! There is so little that is really bad, if one understands. But—I do not realize how strong the call of art must be—how could you give him up ? "

" You were not meant to realize it, and thank God

that you do not," Narmi said. "How could I give him up, you say? Sometimes I do not know myself, and other times I see that it was the only way. But about the child? Do you think I was wicked about the child?"

"It died."

"Yes, but if it had lived I should have deserted it, put it away with strangers."

Raby watched Antonia breathlessly as she considered the question; at that moment there was something almost boyish and shy about the poise of her head and the expression of her face. "I have never had any children; I don't know how much they count in a woman's life." Her eyelashes were so close together that only a slit of the blue of her eyes was visible.

Raby turned away and looked out of the window; there was a little pause. Narmi drew a long breath. "How wise you are in your quiet way—and how beautiful. There is no doubt about your beauty. And since you are named 'Antonia' too, perhaps inspired by me, I wonder if I may kiss you once."

"Of course." Antonia's voice was very gracious.

The two women kissed each other, and then Narmi drew slowly away. She looked round the room, collecting herself and her things.

"Will you please bring my bag," she said imperiously to Raby, and, opening the door, passed out. Raby picked up the tiny black velvet affair and followed her from the room. Half-way down the stairs she turned and faced him: "What are you to Mrs. Chaine, or Mrs. Chaine to you?" she said abruptly.

Raby's yellow eyes were positively vindictive as they fastened themselves coldly upon her.

"I entirely fail to understand either suggestion, Madame."

"And you wonder by what right I am guilty of such impertinence?"

"I confess it was very near my thoughts."

Narmi laughed. "Look at me," she said, "look at me!" stamping her foot, "and tell me why."

For a moment or two they looked at each other steadily, and something in the poise of her small head and the set of her red lips struck Raby as strangely familiar.

"By Jove!" he said at last, his eyes bright with a sudden understanding; "so that's it. But—I don't think I can ever forgive you."

"No, I thought you couldn't. You care too much—for *her*." She turned and went on down the stairs, and the servants were waiting in the hall.

Raby followed her out to her carriage, putting the footman on one side. "At least tell me who your husband was," he said, his face at the carriage window. "What objection can there be—*now?*"

Narmi pressed the electric button telling the chauffeur to start, and looked at Raby lazily between her lashes. She had recovered all her *espièglerie*.

"You can look for him among the pictures at Brancaster House," she said, as she drove away.

He went back to the studio to find Antonia full of interest and excitement.

"Raby, I thought her fascinating—what did you?"

"I did too."

"Of course, anyone would forgive her anything, if only for her charm, her eyes, and her way of telling her own story."

"She didn't make excuses for herself, anyway."

"No, she didn't, but she couldn't help looking them. I have never heard a famous *cocotte* tell her own story before."

Raby was surprised. "Don't call her that," he said sharply.

"Why not? Isn't she?"

"Certainly not; she is a genius, and a genius is a person apart. She belongs to the Semiramises, the Phrynes and Cleopatras and Helens of the world—the women who make history—would you call them simply *cocottes?*"

"No, I suppose not, though I daresay the women of their age did. I wonder why you minded so much."

Raby looked at her queerly. If this was how she felt, she must never be allowed to know. It had never occurred to him that Antonia would take this view. Her attitude was the attitude of a princess towards a mummer—a kind, indulgent princess, fascinated by the mummer's charm, interested in her life, sorrowing in her sorrows, but holding herself aloof all the while. She did not judge her—Antonia seldom judged anybody—but quite unconsciously she felt herself to be in a different walk of life. Antonia was a patrician at heart; it was as natural to her as the air she breathed. The strange thing was that Raby would have known how she was going to feel for any other woman in the same position, but for *this* woman he had, perhaps quite unreasonably, expected her to feel differently.

"I minded because I think you are unfair to her," he said sharply.

Antonia looked faintly surprised, but ignored his tone. She simply didn't understand it. "There are so many things I should like to have asked her about

her husband," she went on—" what she felt like when he died ! "

" How beastly cruel of you—sticking a penknife into a wound and jabbing it about."

" She couldn't have cared very much or she wouldn't have sent him away when he came back."

" I don't believe that. She would never have done it in the first place if he hadn't wanted to go of his own accord ; she would have been perfectly all right if he had not left her."

Antonia smiled. " How like a man to think that ! She would have done it all the same, sooner or later."

" I don't believe it."

" Then do you think he ought not to have gone ? "

" Ah ! I don't say that. It was a very difficult question—a woman is always a difficult question, Tonita."

" What would you have done ? "

" I don't know."

" I do—you would have gone."

" Not when she was ill, at any rate. That was shocking bad luck on her."

" Ah ! but he didn't know that," Antonia said quickly.

Raby laughed. " Very well, I am not going to deny it. Perhaps I should have gone ; perhaps I shouldn't." He had taken a carved jade figure off the mantelpiece and was turning it about between his fingers. " It was a wonderful romance, and I still believe he lost a woman in a thousand, in ten thousand, by leaving her."

Antonia shook her head. " No," she said, " it was fate. Narmi and her beauty and her art belonged to the world. No man could have held her for ever.

He seems to have kept her heart—nobody could have kept more."

Raby replaced the small jade figure. "You may be right," he said finally, "but I shall still think otherwise. If I had found a woman with a temperament like that, who knew how to love as she did, I should never have let her send me away."

"Yes, she has an extraordinary temperament," Antonia said, "one can see that; but perhaps she wasn't the *easiest* person to live with."

Raby raised the jade figure, and put him down again with deliberation. "Once having had her to love, I should think she would be *impossible* to live without."

There was a pause, during which Antonia heard the beating of her own heart; it was this sort of thing about Raby that made her care; the extraordinary appreciation he had for a woman was something that nobody else ever seemed to have in quite the same way.

She changed the subject.

"Do many of—these sort of people—have children, do you suppose, Raby?"

"Yes."

"What do they do with them?"

"Lots of them are sent to convents to be brought up."

"Poor little things. All the same, I wish hers had not died."

"Why?"

"Because she led such a wonderful life in preparation for it. I don't think it *could* have failed altogether. I should like to have seen."

Raby was looking at her face. "Yes! wasn't it a ripping idea—lying about in the sun, caressing flowers. I'm glad she did it."

"And the soul that was not destined to be lonely—what a curious thought."

"Yes. Do you remember, Tonita, once I said to you that your eyes had the sleepiness of the droning of bees?"

"You didn't say *my* eyes—well, what about it?"

"Only she said she meant her child to have blue eyes that held in them the sleepiness of the buzzing of insects in the sun. It's the same thing."

"Yes," Antonia said blankly; she didn't see much point in the similarity.

They were standing close together, Raby looking down at her preoccupied face.

"It ought to have been a wonderful child—born of love if any child ever was."

"Yes, but it died. That's what I think so disappointing."

"It's the only part of her story I don't believe," Raby said slowly.

Antonia was startled. "Don't you? Why?"

"I think she was lying."

"Raby!"

Away somewhere far distant in the house they heard the opening and shutting of a door; something told them it was Adam coming to the studio.

"I can't stay and talk to your husband, Tonita, much as I appreciate him. I feel excited and upset. Good-bye—it's been a thrilling afternoon." He picked up her left hand which hung by her side, and shook it gently.

Down the passage she heard him explaining to Adam that Narmi had been too elusive for them after all.

Once outside, Raby lost no time in making for his club and writing a letter, which was duly addressed

to the owner of Brancaster House, a personal friend of his own, asking for permission to view the famous picture galleries on a day when they were not opened to the public.

Brancaster House was about one hour by motor from London, and on the appointed day Raby went down there, full of an acute feeling of expectation that was something much more than mere interest or curiosity.

The librarian had been asked to show him round; they wandered about together, the guide finding no lack of inspiration in Raby's readiness to listen to all and any extracts from the family annals, however trivial they might be.

Before the portrait of a man in the uniform of the Guards, dated 1878, he stopped decisively, and for a long while; he had found what he was looking for—there was no mistaking the likeness to another face he knew by heart. "I should say that was a very good portrait," he said at last.

"I believe it is; I have heard it said so. An interesting face, is it not?"

"It attracts me enormously."

Under the picture was written, "Caryl William Eric Marsh-Fontaine, 3rd son of the 11th Baron Mexborough."

"You never knew him, I suppose?" Raby asked.

The librarian laughed. "Did you *know* he was dead, or did you guess it? As a matter of fact, he would only have been fifty-eight if he had been alive now; he is the brother of the present Lord Mexborough, you know."

"I heard it somewhere," Raby answered vaguely. "Tell me about him. When did he die, and how?"

"He died quite young—thirty-seven or thirty-eight, I believe—on some expedition in Africa. He was a V.C. man and particularly distinguished all round."

"He looks it."

"Yes—I believe he was a remarkable personality, impetuous and quixotic, yet cool to the last degree. There are various stories Lord Mexborough tells of him—some wonderful defence of a fort amongst others." The librarian smiled. "But these things are not much appreciated nowadays; the pen is far mightier than the sword. The deeds that won the Empire are rather belittled, categoried contemptuously as mere ebullitions of brute courage—a species of buccaneering. It's wonderful how the world has changed even in the last thirty years. To be a distinguished man in England now, you must bring in measures for *de*struction of property—not do and dare for the *con*struction of Empire."

Raby laughed. "It's very nearly true. But I'm afraid I am old-fashioned enough to still rather glory in the old traditions. Did Caryl Marsh-Fontaine ever marry?"

The librarian began to get tired of being rooted to the same spot; he moved onwards slowly.

"We ought to get on to the Vandycks and Gainsboroughs and Lelys," he said, looking at his watch. "Those are the real pictures of interest. Was he married, did you say? No—he never married. There was a lady he was devoted to—what *was* the story? I have heard Lady Mexborough speak of it. It was someone very well known—an actress or a foreigner—I have forgotten. But at any rate they never married—Marsh-Fontaine himself was far too adventurous a spirit to settle down quietly, I imagine."

The Vandycks, the Gainsboroughs, and the Lelys held no particular interest for Raby that afternoon, but he went through them intelligently, nevertheless, sticking to his task with a will. And all the time he was making plans for some day bringing Antonia down to look at the place. He wanted to watch her, to see what she thought of it, if it specially appealed to her, what she would say of the portrait. For himself, he felt convinced that with the place and the portrait she would be entirely in sympathy.

A few days later he received a letter addressed in a strange, cramped, foreign writing. There was something folded within a sheet, but on the sheet was written : " To do with as seems best to you, only do not be in haste. Think one hundred times, and use all your discretion before you do anything, and, perhaps, in the end, do nothing."

He read that first, and then he opened what was folded inside. It was the marriage certificate, made out in Paris, dated 1888, of Caryl William Eric Marsh-Fontaine and Antonia Annunziata Narmi.

He studied it with minute attention, lost in thought ; it conjured up many pictures in his mind.

" A woman's intuition is the most amazing thing," he said to himself. " Why did she send it to me ? "

Then he folded it up carefully and locked it away.

CHAPTER XIV

IT was in Paris one morning in May, about a year from the time he had first met Antonia, that Raby came out of a house in the Rue de Courcelles, and stood on the steps, bareheaded, smoking a cigarette. It was 4 a.m.—he had been dancing in this very house——at least he had played bridge while others danced, and every time he was dummy he dashed out and waltzed with little Comtesse Paul Pierrepoix, a bride of eighteen summers, who seemed to him unusually naïve, charming, chic, and pretty. The evening had just been amusing enough to induce him to stay late.

Behind him, through the open doorway, the house was still shuttered-up and lit by electricity, the band continuing to play languid waltz music, the younger dancers tireless as ever; but out here, on the steps, a new day had dawned, warm, fresh, fragrant, lit by pale sunbeams.

Raby felt alert and full of life and fresh endeavour, despite the hour; the sunshine was going to his head like champagne, the morning air came and played on his forehead like the first breath of spring, heavy with a thousand promises. He knew perfectly well the reason why he could not feel sleepy or tired—he had never for a moment forgotten it, even while he played bridge and teased Madame de Pierrepoix on her newly-married airs.

Antonia was arriving in Paris that morning; she

was travelling by that abominable night service, which was very foolish, and would tire her, but otherwise it was good to know that by the time he had had two or three hours' sleep, bathed and dressed, he would be able to go and see her.

He felt absurdly gay and happy—in the mood to "rag" with anyone, to tip the porter ridiculously high, to bandy friendly words with *gamins* in the street, to chaff the drowsy *cochers*, all drawn up in a line outside the house, each one almost rolling off his box-seat with fatigue and ennui!

The porter was calling a taxi. Raby pulled out his watch and looked at it idly. Yes! at 5.40 a.m. she would be arriving at the Gare du Nord—Adam had told him so the other night at the Ritz when they had dined together. Since then Adam had departed for Rome, regretting that some important engagement prevented him waiting another twenty-four hours in Paris for his wife's arrival. Raby thought it negligent of him—he considered that a wife like Antonia should be the most important engagement in a man's life.

He remembered how Adam had said that Antonia was foolishly inclined to wear herself out for her friends and her charities. It seemed that she had promised to open some bazaar in the East End of London on the preceding afternoon, and to be at a friend's wedding in Paris at noon on the following day. Therefore she had no choice but to travel over-night. Adam thought it wilful waste of a night's rest, and for once Raby agreed with him. They had hobnobbed together over it at the time, with the happy superiority of two male creatures.

A message from the wailing violins floated out on to the steps—*Reviens—Reviens*—the waltz-time sounded

strangely seductive, and yet out of place in the sunshine. To Raby it faithfully interpreted his own mood, while the violins whispered things about Antonia. Suddenly he flung away the end of his cigarette, ran down the steps, signed to the porter to lower the back part of the taxi, opening it to the fresh, cool air, and drove away in the direction of the flat he was sharing with his mother in the Avenue Victor Hugo, with every appearance of having come to a decision.

Ever since Adam had told him of Antonia's intended visit, he had planned to call upon her about ten o'clock —but now he knew that to wait until the conventional hour had become an impossibility—he couldn't bear to waste a moment—he would go and meet her at the station. It didn't matter what Antonia thought—his would be the action of one enslaved indeed !—but it didn't matter, nothing mattered—he wanted to see her ; prudence and restraint might go the winds for this one time.

He wasn't going to be Antonia's lap-dog—she was the last woman in the world to whom such a thing should be allowed—but for this one time he would let himself go, and readjust her point of view later, if necessary.

Antonia would be surprised ; she did not expect him—did not know he knew of her arrival ; would not have expected him if she had. This made it a million times more alluring. It would be a delicious experience, something to remember, for not every day can one see the person one cares about more than anything else in the world, on a divine May morning in Paris before the world is awake.

Raby had been in Paris nearly a month, and had not seen Antonia for five weeks. The fact was, he had

begun to take his finances very seriously ; he was there partly on business, and partly to see something of his mother before leaving her on a contemplated absence abroad.

Hitherto he had been quite content to get along as best he could on what money he had ; there had always been just enough for everything he wanted to do, and for himself he had not cared about having a large income because, without it, he had managed to enjoy so many of the good things of life that cannot be bought. He was not wildly extravagant for himself, though certainly not economical over trifles. In money matters he was what dependents call a " gentleman," and very often they know what they are talking about.

It didn't worry him in the least having to buy young polo ponies and hunters, because he couldn't afford the best of the finished articles ; it rather amused him to make them and sell at a profit. He had always been able to pay for his shooting and exploring expeditions, rooms in St. James's, and other necessary personal expenses. So long as he could *do* all the things he wanted, he had not cared about possessing expensive toys like motors and yachts and moors in Scotland ; he had been quite content that his friends should possess them and invite him to participate. Least of all had he worried about his banking account—it had been easy come and easy go in a moderate way, but now all this was subtly changing.

Raby loved his home passionately, every stick and stone of it, so much so, that though it would have been expedient to let it for a few years, he absolutely forbade any mention of the idea of strangers inhabiting the place. The death duties when his father died had been very heavy ; they had crippled the estate considerably.

Never too well off for the amount of land they possessed, there was now nothing for the Stigands to do but practically close up the place, reducing the entire staff to a minimum while they tried to pull things round.

Seven years ago the house had been put to sleep in its holland coverings, and had remained so ever since. Only in the autumns, when not abroad, Raby went down there with a few bachelor friends and shot over the estate, picnicking cosily in the housekeeper's room; he had meant to continue like this for a good many years, with the prospect of going back there again eventually when things had righted themselves. It had been a matter of keen regret—the inability to live in his own house; but he had gradually accustomed himself to the idea, and it had the solitary advantage of giving him his freedom. Instead of being tied to one place, and more or less fettered by responsibilities, he had been able to wander all over the globe at his own will.

Lately, however, circumstances had greatly altered his point of view, and dreams of opening up the place considerably sooner than he originally intended were occupying many of his thoughts.

He now saw the beautiful old Tudor house, its mullioned windows and oak wainscoting, its beams, its chapel, its banqueting hall reaching from floor to roof, its oaken staircase grown black with age, as a suitable background for Antonia. He had never considered this in connection with Daisy Post or any other woman —but it was the dream of his life now to see Antonia in his home. Unmarried, he had merely regretted, with a certain amount of philosophy, the inability to live there; married, it would seem an unbearable deprivation.

But he was absolutely determined that before he asked Antonia to accept the position of Chatelaine at "Mullions" the place would have to be renovated, possess its full complement of servants, have electric light, more baths and other comforts added, gardens and covers stocked and put in order. He felt that he would rather sell the place outright, and take her to live elsewhere on an entirely different scale, than ask her to live in it in its present condition on the income he had now. It didn't suit women, he thought, to lack comforts; he couldn't even imagine Antonia badly dressed, or living with only the hard, bare, ugly necessities. Other people might not look at it in this light—Antonia herself might not have; but Raby would never have consulted her. His firmest conviction was that once matrimonial life became sordid, the romance of it was over. In the meantime, the very last thing he had any intention of doing was to sell "Mullions"; not till everything was considerably more hopeless than it was at present would he even face the idea. He was by no means ambitious of having things done regardless of extravagance, after the manner transatlantic millionaires have made fashionable; he merely wanted to have the estate running on a sound and solid basis, and to live on it in comfortable, homely, sane, and practical fashion, according to modern requirements.

Raby rather despised the millionaire methods, considered them lacking in *finesse*, or any real appreciation of beauty or enjoyment. He felt that the people never really belonged to the land, or the land to them. While they paid for endless foreign luxuries they missed all the really priceless luxuries of the home-grown variety, which lay unnoticed at their feet.

Raby's idea of home was rather a strangely thought-out one for a man ; it was a kind of poem of good management and homely comforts and hospitality. He liked home-made bread, and knew that it should be baked in a brick oven ; he liked home-cured hams and home-made cider, and home-made cheeses and preserves, and meat that had been roasted on an old-fashioned spit before the fire. He liked to burn peat from his own fields and logs from his own woods. He liked to have an immaculate laundry and a model dairy, and servants who had been there a very long time, and whose honour was bound up with the honour of the house.

He liked to eat his own produce as it came round in season, but absolutely put his foot down on buying, for his own home, forced fruits from abroad. He was inclined to think with amusement, faintly tinged with contempt, of the people who, while over-paying their staff, possessing a real tennis-court, a swimming-bath, strings of motor-cars, masses of gold plate, three or four secretaries, and other minor extravagances, permit their servants to *buy* bread from the village, cook the meat in ovens, thereby losing all its real flavour and goodness, and give their stud-grooms carte blanche only to have their horses as badly turned-out as possible.

The women with whom he discussed these household matters were often amused at Raby's interest in them, sometimes surprised and pleased—they didn't expect so much knowledgeable appreciation from a man.

With all these visions of homeliness Antonia was inextricably mixed up. He could see her in it all, interested, content—it was the entourage, he felt sure, which would suit her above everything, the foreign

element in her nature giving to it something extraordinarily piquant that other people did not possess.

He thought of it and thought of it till plans formed for the achievement of his purpose were only the natural outcome. He was perfectly willing to give up polo ponies and rooms in town, and any other unnecessary expenses, only, unfortunately, they would make so little difference. As it was, he only drew about three thousand a year for his own personal expenses ; the rest went in paying off mortgages. Even his mother, who was his right hand and his steward, lived entirely on her own private income, refusing to touch her jointure.

Raby and his mother were pals in the best sense of the word ; they kept house together with extraordinary success. Mrs. Stigand had many French relations and friends ; it was her custom to take a flat in Paris every spring, and, if not abroad, Raby was constantly with her. His interests for the moment were very much bound up with land in California ; he had been offered a good billet with excellent prospects. His idea was to live out there for the next five or six years at least, in a small, comfortable colonial house on his own land—to live with increased simplicity, spend every available penny on righting the estate, and make as much money as he could. He had another very large interest also—in Abyssinia ; the forming of an international company for the opening-up of a vast cotton plantation. It was partly business in connection with this which had taken him to Paris. He knew that his very real knowledge of countries and conditions was a tremendous assistance, and believed in his own ability to succeed.

As yet, however, he had not accepted the billet in California ; he was thinking it over, with every inten-

tion of finally closing with the offer. But he did not mean to go alone if he could possibly persuade Antonia to go with him. He knew that he did not intend asking her to rough it ; it would merely be asking her to lead a different life. He meant her to have all the comforts necessary or possible in the world to which she would be going. He considered that it was " roughing it " to be the wife of an English landlord and not to be able to do as others do ; to screw and save and live at half-mast, so to speak. He wouldn't be able to bear to see his wife in her own circle, among her own friends, less well-equipped than they, at a disadvantage.

But surely it was scarcely the same thing to live simply where life is set on altogether different lines, and where the climate is greatly in your favour. Raby had a tremendous belief in the power of sunlight ; he thought it turned most things, however poor, into gold. Besides, it was an excellent thing for anyone—man, woman, or child—to live in the Colonies for a bit—it readjusted their point of view, corrected the tendency to attach too much importance to trifles.

At the same time he was torn with a hundred doubts. " Would it be asking too much of her ? Was it fair to take her away from all the good things she possessed ? Would she hate it ? Was it likely that she would ever care enough for him ? "

However, if he accepted the billet, it would not mean going out there till early autumn ; he had all the summer before him in which to deal with Antonia, and until something was definitely settled he did not intend to speak to her at all, unless—unless, indeed, the psychological moment arrived, unsought.

The taxi stopped at 119 Avenue Victor Hugo Raby got out, opened the door quickly with his latch-

key, and found his way noiselessly to his own room. He bathed, and changed deliberately, without haste, but with a wild feeling of elation inside; then let himself out again, stepped into the waiting taxi, and drove to the station, stopping on the way to buy from a little flower-stall that was just setting up in one of the smaller streets near the Gare du Nord, a big bunch of red roses, the dew still fresh upon them. He arrived at the station ten minutes before the train was expected and composed himself to wait at the barrier, his arms folded on the rail, the roses tucked within them. It must be confessed that he presented a very clean and attractive appearance in his grey morning suit and pink and white shirt, his amused-looking yellow eyes searching the people and the platform.

The train steamed in; he watched the passengers descend, Antonia among the rest. She stopped for a word with Léontine, who was busily raining instructions, packages, and commands at a particularly stolid, impervious-looking gentleman in a blue blouse and a porter's cap, and then walked slowly on, a small green leather case in her hand.

Raby watched her, a smile in his eyes, as she came nearer and nearer—still unconscious of his presence. She looked extraordinarily neat and distinguished, walking down the platform in a sort of girlish, dreamy way, her eyes looking for nothing in particular, vague, lost in thoughts of her own. It was clear from her gait and her carriage that she did not consider herself in the eye of the world; she was as alone, in her own mind, as if she had been on a desert island. She was dressed in a grey whipcord coat and skirt, from the breast-pocket of which a lilac handkerchief hung out with careless chic; she had grey suède boots, a soft, crushable hat

enswathed in a lace veil, and grey gloves that pulled up well over the cuffs.

Quite near the barrier she became aware of a patch of colour in the fusty old station ; she raised her eyes lazily in the direction of the roses.

" Raby ! " There was no mistaking the amazement in her face, or the welcome.

Raby laughed, and stepped back to meet her as she came through, raising his hat. He felt as if he was twenty-one again—as if all the world was twenty-one. " Tonita," he said, holding her hand, " You don't even look tired. I thought you would be dead."

" No—I don't feel it. How did you know I was coming ? "

" Adam told me. It's splendid you've come ; Paris is at its best just now."

" I know ! Raby, did you get up on purpose to meet me ? "

He laughed. " I'm afraid I never went to bed. I was just thinking of it, when I realized that you would be here in an hour."

" These clothes ? " pointing at his suit.

" I changed into them an hour ago."

She smiled. " It sounds like Paris. Do you *ever* go to bed over here ? "

" Sometimes. What are you going to do now ? "

Antonia looked round vaguely. " Léontine has to get the luggage through the *douane*."

" What did you mean to do ? "

" I was going on up to the hotel—it's no use waiting."

" Let's go then—just what I should have suggested. I've got a taxi."

They walked along together and out of the station, leaving a trail of rose perfume behind them. For them

it seemed as if all life was hung up, suspended ; as if everybody in the world was dead, and only they two were left alive, looking in each other's eyes. They drove through the empty sunlit streets, chatting all the while, till they reached the hotel near the Etoile where Antonia always stayed if she was in Paris alone. It was very small, with no restaurant ; its furnishings, cuisine, and service quite perfect—the sort of hotel one finds in Paris and nowhere else.

" Adam promised to tell them I was arriving by this train," Antonia said as they stepped out. " I hope they'll have coffee or something ready."

But for once Adam, usually so punctilious about the smallest detail, had forgotten. The vestibule was deserted, the night porter momentarily behind the scenes, the concierge not yet on duty, the place asleep, the blinds down—it was 6 a.m. Again they looked at each other, and the feeling of being cut off from the world, with a mystic hush everywhere and all around, was upon them.

Antonia laughed. " What fun ! " she said in the low whispering voice of a conspirator. "Adam must have forgotten—it isn't like him. They evidently aren't expecting me till this afternoon. Never mind. I know my suite, I always have the same—just up there. Let's go up without ringing for anyone."

Together they stole up the short flight to the entresol, and entered the apartment ; it was in order, ready, empty, clean, but with the blinds down.

Antonia ran to the windows, flung them open, and pulled up the blinds. The green trees of the little hotel garden swayed their branches in the breeze just outside.

They made a tour of the apartment, pulling up all the blinds, opening all the windows. There was a small

hall, a sitting-room, a bedroom, a dressing-room, a bathroom, and a room for Léontine. Raby poked about everywhere, taking it all in. They finally ended up in Antonia's bedroom ; she sank on to the sofa and looked round.

" It will look quite different with my things in it," she said happily.

" Yes," Raby said, " there is something remarkably decorative about lace and ribbons and chiffons laid about on chairs."

" Do you think Léontine will be long ? "

Raby was watching her. " A goodish time, I should think ; there was rather a crowd in the train," he answered her question mechanically, his mind somewhere else. " How do you manage to look so fresh ? Your face is like a morning in England, your shirt looks as if it had this moment left the hands of an expert French laundress."

It was true that she looked remarkably chic and *soignée*, despite the journey.

" I don't know—I didn't think I did. I should like to comb up my hair more than anything."

" It doesn't need it, but why don't you ? "

" I will, if you pass me that bag." She stretched out her hand lazily.

" Shall I unpack it for you ? " Raby said.

" Certainly, if you like."

He drew a chair up to the dressing-table and sat down, the bag on his knees. He began slowly and carefully to unpack the contents. There was a tortoiseshell brush and comb, and tortoiseshell powder and hairpin boxes. There were a roll of cotton-wool, some orange sticks for manicure, a clothes-brush, lipsalve, a soft face-towel, one gold-stoppered bottle of smelling-

salts, another of scent, an ivory box that contained soap, a sachet with clean handkerchiefs, and several other things.

From the sofa Antonia tried to watch the proceedings; then she got up and drew nearer, amused and laughing. She looked round for a seat; there was nothing handy but a heavy arm-chair, that required a good deal of dragging up, and a clothes-basket. She pulled forward the clothes-basket by the purple bow that adorned its lid, and sat on the top of it, dangling her toes.

"There!" Raby said, having unscrewed the last bit of tissue paper and disclosed a pair of nail scissors. "I suppose these are what you really want." He put forward the cotton-wool, the powder, and the lipsalve.

"How dare you know so much?" Antonia said.

He turned and surveyed her, sitting perched up on the clothes-basket, her face very near his own. She had removed her coat and hat, and the sun was shining on her blue-black hair—the parting very white, the hair very thick and close on her low forehead. There was something in the situation, in her attitude, extraordinarily homely and *intime*. It stirred him oddly, held his eyes—he couldn't take them away.

"Before I met you, Tonita, I thought I should always have to like half-a-dozen women."

"Why?"

"For the different qualities they each possessed."

"I see—you wanted them tall *and* short."

"Yes—something like that."

"Well! no one can be both."

"Yes, they can—you are. Sometimes you are enormously tall—a stately creature, positively alarming—looking as if you considered man a servile being,

created to minister to your wants. And sometimes, like this present moment, sitting there on the clothes-basket, you are a tiny thing, made to be petted and bullied. Sometimes I'm almost afraid of you, and sometimes you are the homeliest woman in the world (not in the American sense, please note). One can talk to you about any old thing, so long as it's simple and 'comfy.'" He seemed quite simple and "comfy" himself when he said it; for once they were not attempting to fence with each other.

"What sort of thing?"

"Oh, how you tax my ingenuity! Say a savoury omelette, or a cold in the head, or a hole in the blanket."

Antonia laughed. "What an old maid," she said, biting a piece of chocolate Raby had unpacked. "Fancy a man even noticing a hole in the blanket."

"Why not? It might catch in his toe just as well as yours. As a matter of fact, I happened to find one not very long ago, and told my landlady about it next morning."

"Then, I suppose, if you had a house of your own you would be very particular?"

"Frightfully. I should have the boiler cleaned out every six months."

Antonia laughed. "Are my houses up to your standard?"

"Yes."

"That's more Adam than me."

"I know—but your own personal things—he doesn't look after them."

"No. Do you like them?"

"Yes—you know I do. I think you've got an eye for detail. Women always ought to have their paraphernalia dainty—that's the idea of them. Precious

few do, though—one generally finds a flaw somewhere."

"Haven't you ever seen a hole in my stocking?"

"Never—but I should love to."

"That's contradictory."

"Very likely—but circumstances alter cases."

Raby drew away restlessly; he felt he had looked at Antonia long enough. He wandered to the window and played with the silk bobbles on the curtain. "Let's go out," he said suddenly. "It looks divine outside. When Léontine *does* arrive, she will have to unpack before you can bathe or dress, or even go to bed."

"Yes—do let's," Antonia said. She jumped off the clothes-basket, combed up her hair, passed a powder-puff caressingly over her nose, and pinned her hat on.

Raby was watching her from the window.

"Shall I put a veil on?" she said, consulting him like a child.

"No!"

They went out together, forgetting to explain anything to the astonished porter who had never seen them arrive.

After walking about a hundred yards they took a taxi to the Bois, dismissing it near the Pré Catalan. Antonia wanted to walk on the grass in spite of the dew, from which folly she was gently but firmly persuaded by Raby to desist. They strolled down paths, between lawns decked with flower-beds, surrounded by lilacs and cherry blossom and snowball bushes and laburnums; overhead tall, exquisite trees.

The place was a beautiful pretence, an arrangement by man "after nature," with love and song and dance and wine and revel and a few other of his own inventions put in, as one puts currants into a cake, or as a

Viennese composer weaves the commonplace notes from A to G into an interpretation of exotic love.

Nature herself leaves these things out—she is so impersonal. But here in Paris, Man wanted them ; he craved for them, glorying in his own egotism and lawlessness. The seats for two, tucked away in shady, scented nooks, the roof of the pagoda twinkling in the distance, coquettish, alluring, the even, emerald lawns, the bushes, just so high and no higher, the man-made views—nature had had nothing to do with these. One might almost think she had selected this spot out of all the world in which to give parties for mortals, and had asked some mortals of taste to help her lay it out according to the best traditions of the planet—with strange, fantastic results—like a beautiful, distorted dream. It was 6.45 a.m., the place was theirs, alone and undisputed.

" Our garden-party," Antonia laughed ; she had come under the spell of its unreality ; this was her way of describing it.

" Where are the guests ? "

" I am yours."

They looked at each other and laughed. " It isn't true—alas ! " Raby said.

" Well—let's pretend," Antonia replied. " We'll pretend lots of things that really aren't true. This place ought to make it easy—it's a sort of divine sham —especially at seven o'clock in the morning."

" That's a compact. We pass this morning in the land of pretence. I think I shall enjoy it."

" So shall I ! "

They came in their wanderings upon a stall where an old woman was preparing to sell *gaufres* and coffee. Raby promptly settled Antonia into a chair. " The

very thing—just what you were longing for, only you didn't know it."

They sat down at a table spread with a snowy cloth with a blue border. The old woman bustled about, laying cups and saucers, aided by her granddaughter, a girl of nineteen, whose waist and head had that extraordinarily trim look only achieved by the real *Parisienne*. She had rather a seductive eye, and a pair of red stockings peeping from beneath her short black skirt. Raby watched her, amused and curious. "Look at the way she swings her skirt—rather a darlin'." The old woman followed the direction of their eyes, and observed the interest in her granddaughter.

"Elle va se marier demain," she said, smiling and jerking her thumb over her shoulder.

"Really!" Raby was interested. "Lucky man! A good marriage, Madame?"

But the old lady was not whole-heartedly joyful over the match; it seemed that Julie had preferred the poorer of two suitors, purely on account of his *beaux yeux*. However, he was young, he had prospects, he was a good boy. Julie would not look at the other; she cried, and said he was a fright, because he wore round spectacles. So what will you? Girls nowadays were of an independence that was stupefying!

Antonia was listening with her elbows on the table; she said she thought it better that Julie should be allowed to marry for love.

The old woman looked at her quickly, put down a sugar basin, and surveyed them with interest. "Monsieur et Madame sont mariés?" she asked in the politest possible manner, making a gesture from one to another.

There was a moment's pause.

"Yes," Raby said, "since yesterday."

The old woman was delighted; she threw her apron almost over her head. "They were married in Paris, then?—and up so early?" Her face was a study in surprise; she had always thought the English a little mad—now she knew it."

"No," Raby informed her, "they were married in England, and crossed on the night boat. They had come to spend their honeymoon in Paris, beloved of both."

The old woman had never heard anything so strange in her life, so extraordinary, so amazing. Nevertheless, she congratulated them both a thousand times; Monsieur had a beautiful wife—but beautiful beyond all words! Madame had a husband to be proud of. She shook Raby's hand respectfully, and kissed Antonia's; she was kind and interested beyond belief. The coffee should be piping hot, the *gaufres* especially worthy of their attention, if only in honour of the great event. She was motherly and beaming and solicitous, and withal oddly speculative; she was thinking of last night's crossing.

And presently she faded away, retiring gracefully, with tact and discretion, a louis clasped in her right hand—"to buy something for the new home of the granddaughter in the red stockings," as Raby said.

Antonia sat quietly on, her hat making a deep shadow across her eyes. She had not moved or spoken.

"Raby, how could you tell her that?"

Raby laughed whole-heartedly. "I loved it. This is the land of pretence—you said so yourself. I am going to make the most of it."

If it was a challenge, Antonia accepted it in silence, crunching *gaufres* with a sort of dainty greed, and

drinking coffee. Overhead the acacias smelt like nothing out of Paradise.

"Isn't it ripping here now?" Raby said, leaning back in his chair with a sigh of contentment; "in three hours the charm will have gone."

"I suppose that depends on the point of view," Antonia answered.

"Yes, well! that's mine. What is yours?"

"I think it's nicer now; 'people' rather spoil things."

"I hate 'people.'" Raby blew a ring of smoke; he was thinking. "In spite of the way you revel in gaieties and admiration—because you *do* like it, Tonita, although you manage to make some people believe it's nothing to you—I'm thankful you aren't what I call one of the 'grimly-social' women."

Antonia laughed. "What is being 'grimly-social'?"

"Oh, you know."

"Yes, I think I do, but I like you to explain."

"Well, you know the sort of creatures who look upon a man or woman not as an individual, but as a means to an end, the end being an invitation or an introduction, or some other rotten thing like that; whose eyes are always popping out of their heads looking for who they can shake hands with next, and whose lips, thin and wreathed in stiff, meaningless smiles, look as if they haven't been kissed for years. It's perfectly disgusting; they aren't women at all, but just sort of wretched, withered things. By Jove! my wife, if I ever have one, won't be allowed to develop on those lines. If I see any signs of it, I shall snatch her away and bury her where she won't see anyone but me."

Antonia laughed; she was evidently thinking of something that amused her. "Yes!" she said, "I

know the sort, and I don't like them ; but they aren't any worse than the people who are all ' grim-love.' "

Raby laughed outright ; he was delighted ; he knew exactly what she meant.

" What is ' grim-love,' Tonita ? "

Her eyes were almost black in the shade of her hat-brim. " Oh, you know ! I can't explain things like you can."

" Try."

" Well, I mean the people who are all kiss and grip, with no sense of humour at all—monotonous, serious, tragic, sickly-sentimental—you know all those horrors." She laughed and turned her eyes away from his with the little sweep of her eyelashes that was somehow indescribably naughty. " No laughter, no shadows, no hide-and-seek, no onslaughts or retreats, no ambush, no *play*." She was looking away now into a depth of shade somewhere behind him.

" I know," Raby said gently. " The people who leave out all the fairyland of love. Yes ! you wouldn't like that."

She turned her eyes to his.

" Nor would you."

" No—I couldn't bear it."

There was silence for a minute or two while they watched each other. " I don't believe you've ever been serious in your life," Raby said at last ; " but who taught you how to play so well ? "

" Much of it is a natural gift—but I became proficient under an expert."

" Who ? "

" Yourself."

He laughed quickly. " You are only pretending."

" Of course—wasn't that agreed upon ? "

"You're a wicked woman."

Her head was bent over the table, her eyes cast down, while her fingers arranged some crumbs in a straight line. Raby watched her, blowing a ring of smoke.

"Poor 'grimly-social' people, and people who are all 'grim-love'—what they miss! But you see, it isn't given to everyone to be at the same time a nun and a Viennese waltz."

Antonia did not answer; she had suddenly made up her mind that what she wanted more than anything—what she had been wanting from the very beginning, was to hear Raby say "I love you." He had often said things to her which no woman could fail to appreciate—things that nobody else would ever think of, or be able to say in quite the same way—but it wasn't enough. She wanted to hear the one supreme thing, to which all others were merely stepping-stones. For months she had been worrying about the other woman in the case, thinking it out, looking at it from this point of view and that. Now, quite suddenly, she had arrived at one conclusion: Raby was meant for herself—they were meant for each other—he didn't really belong to the other woman at all.

But did he know this? Had he found it out too? Or was the knowledge of it yet to dawn? She thought now that the story of the other woman admitted of two explanations: either it was an old entanglement which was still holding him fast, or the other woman had become such a habit of mind that Raby himself was obtuse enough not to see that Antonia was really the woman he wanted. More complex than that even, she felt quite often that he *did* see it, but deliberately put it away from him. How often had they not seemed perilously near the edge of some great disclosure,

and then, one or other of them, had quietly stepped back? Antonia thought this was partly because she herself had always remembered the other woman, had been in a thousand minds about her. Sometimes she had thought Raby really loved his "She"; again she was certain he was destined for herself. Sometimes she had made up her mind to cast him out of her life, leave him alone, forget him; again, finding this impossible, she had planned to keep him merely as a friend. But now—now, the other woman might go to the winds; she was a failure, a blunder, a hideous mistake.

For herself, Antonia knew that London was a howling wilderness or a densely populated and charming city according to Raby's absence from it or presence in it; that rooms were either empty or full for the same reason; that the weather, her happiness, the future, and everything else depended for its brightness on this one man. He entered into every song she heard, every picture that she looked at, every flower she wore, every sunset, every dance, every discussion, every book, every colour. She wanted him—wanted him to tell her that he loved her.

"One penny?" Raby said, leaning over the table. He had been watching the white fingers lazily arranging crumbs into squares and circles; he longed to know what thoughts were going on behind the veiled eyes.

Antonia looked up, feeling suddenly tired physically. She felt she couldn't play any more, couldn't go on any longer; she must rest, think it over, and then begin again, refreshed. She glanced at the watch on her wrist. "I'm tired now; I think I should like to go in and get an hour's sleep before I dress for the wedding. Let's go back."

She rose, and Raby rose too. He brushed a crumb gently off the frill of her shirt—it brought them close together.

"Raby, what are you doing to-night?" She was looking at him.

"I hoped I should be able to take you somewhere."

She gave a sigh of contentment. "Yes, let's do that. You settle everything; where to dine, and what theatre."

They strolled along, moving in the direction of Paris, and when they found a taxi they got in it and drove to the hotel, and went up the stairs again, feeling like two children feel when they are hand in hand.

Antonia walked through the *salon* and opened her bedroom door; Léontine was there, on her knees, amidst a seething froth of tissue paper. Raby came to the doorway and looked in—he noted a pink *crêpe de Chine* wrapper, edged everywhere with soft white marabou, lying over a chair, a pair of pink satin slippers beneath it. On the bed, Antonia's own pink, lace-covered bed-spread had been arranged, and on the *chaise-longue* a pile of cushions and a sable rug. The toilet-table was in order, his roses in a vase near the large tortoiseshell mirror. There were a few hats and dresses lying about on chairs, but it needed only another five minutes of the skilful manœuvring of Léontine to reduce everything to harmony and good order. It looked extraordinarily comfortable and homely and enchanted in there, Raby thought, as if it was all waiting for some person. Why not for two? Why must he go away? He felt feverish and half miserable.

Antonia took off her hat and threw it on a chair; she ran her fingers through her hair, holding her hands

on either side of her head. She looked pale and tired, but quite beautiful.

"Isn't Léontine good?" she said, and the Frenchwoman laughed with a little shrug for Madame whom she adored. "Doesn't it look comfortable? I'm going to bathe and then sleep. Till to-night, Raby—you'll come and fetch me, won't you?"

She gave him a hand which he took slowly.

"It's been a charming land of pretence."

"Yes—must we leave it?"

"I think so; but I'll tell you for certain—later."

He went out of the room and down the stairs in a dream, but once outside the stern realities of life gripped him. He knew that he wouldn't be able to go back again—that he couldn't take her out that evening. The morning had been perfect, divine, a memory for always, but it had tried him terribly. He couldn't go back. All day long he was haunted by the picture of Antonia sitting on the clothes-basket, the sun on her hair.

Meanwhile, Antonia slept till Léontine thought it was time for her to dress, and then she got up, and bathed and donned her wedding garment. She was in the highest spirits; all feeling of fatigue had vanished. She discussed gaily with the maid what dress she should wear that evening; she wanted to look her best; Léontine must help her, must advise. Finally, she went off to the wedding, happy, excited, full of dreams and resolves, her eyes shining like two stars. She watched the bride going up the aisle and breathed a special prayer and a blessing, that came straight from her heart, after the retreating figure; she wanted her to be happy; she wanted every bride to know happiness.

At the reception afterwards she met many of her old friends and acquaintances, amongst others Prince Radini. He wanted to come and see her ; she told him she would be at home at five that evening.

When the ceremony was over, and the happy pair had departed, she drifted away with two or three other women to spend an hour or two shopping, and arrived back at the hotel at five minutes past five, to find her guest already there. She came in congratulating him on his punctuality ; Radini could hardly take his eyes off her face ; he found her radiant, entrancing. A *pneumatique* lay on the table ; Antonia picked up the little blue envelope. " May I ? "—it was from Raby, she felt sure, telling her where they were going to dine, and at what time he would call for her. The evening was to be one of the evenings of her life.

She opened it and read it slowly—the words were very few. " Regret unable dine with you to-night. Raby." Then she folded it up carefully, her eyes still lowered, and placed it under a paper-weight. A wave of anger had run through her like quicksilver ; it burned like a fiery furnace. Why did Raby do this thing ? There was not even a proffered excuse. How like him ! How cruel of him ! How—how—horrible he could be. She felt sick with disappointment.

She pulled herself together to talk to Prince Radini ; outwardly she was perfectly calm, perfectly collected—only her eyes had a pale, hard light in them, like white-hot steel.

Radini exerted all his ability to draw her out ; he wanted to know about the things that had happened to her in the two years that had passed since their last meeting. Had anything happened ?—that is what he wanted to know—or was Antonia still the child she had

always been ? He couldn't believe it ; he gazed at her, trying to read her face, but it baffled him, even while he felt sure that she had had experiences of some sort.

" And what of Englishmen, Madame ? " he asked her, in pursuance of a theme in their conversation. " You find them good-looking of course, clean, chivalrous—but—are they interested in women ? "

Antonia was not very good at argument ; she had not that turn of mind. Her answer was vague and scarcely illuminating. " Yes—of course they are—in their own way."

" Between tea and dinner."

" What do you mean ? "

" I mean—their sport—it takes up all their day—and then at night they are tired, they must sleep. Therefore, between tea and dinner is the only time, as far as I can see, that they can have free to devote to ladies."

Antonia laughed, in spite of the fires that were burning within her, scorching, suffocating her. " I don't think they devote *any* time to ladies ; it just happens—or it doesn't."

" That sounds subtle," Radini answered meditatively ; " and yet they are not subtle—it is the last thing."

" Some of them are," Antonia said slowly.

" Ah ? " Radini was interested ; he was on the track now, every faculty alert. But his voice was as languidly disarming as ever. " And you like him ?—What is an Englishman like when he is subtle ? "

" No," Antonia answered—she was thinking of his first question—" No—I think—I think—I *hate* him."

Radini sat up quickly. He had found out all he wanted to know. For a student of human nature like himself, this was all of extraordinary interest.

"You hate him as you hate a woman who has got the better of you," he said quickly.

Antonia was startled; she thought it over and knew it was true. Suddenly she made up her mind to take Radini into her confidence; it would not be necessary to tell him things—if it had been she would have been unequal to the task; he was quite clever enough to piece the situation together for himself; she would like to hear what he had to say.

"It is true," she answered, her eyes on his face, "he has got the better of me." She opened out her small white hands with a gesture that was hopeless but unresigned.

"Ah! I did not say that."

"You inferred it—and it's true."

Radini turned and put his elbow on the back of the sofa; he was surveying her curiously. "It can't be possible—it is *im*possible. A woman like you. Why, you are everything a man wants, and—you only have to find his weakness."

"But I can't find it—I haven't found it. What do you mean?"

Radini drew a shade nearer; he began speaking a little faster; it had a curious effect of suppressed excitement.

"Listen," he said. "Every man, no matter how strong his character may be, has his weakness, and women possess this great advantage over men—they have the gift of finding it out. A man may be a miracle of cleverness, with a surprisingly caustic tongue—but he is also—perhaps—vain. A woman discovers this, and is no longer afraid of him. She offers up incense with both hands, and he becomes like putty between her fingers. Or he may be so good-looking,

so attractive, that he has long ago tired of women's favours—he shies away from a woman who is a generous giver, as a horse shies at shadows in the moonlight. A clever woman divines this in a moment ; she soothes him down, allays his fears, chats gaily of impersonal matters, refuses quite definitely to talk of herself or him, is as tired of all the vulgar obvious things in life as he. Gradually it becomes tantalizing ; the rest and reaction take effect—his interest grows—lo ! another turn of the wheel and he is hers—a captive, just like all the rest. Or again, he may be just the opposite of this—he may be harmlessly, if a trifle idiotically, affectionate. He may want kindness and sympathy, to squeeze her hand or press her toe at dinner. Well ! if she thinks him worth it, she lets him do it. Then, as that sort of person is inclined to be vague and erring as the leaves of a tree in autumn, she gathers him up, takes care he presses no one else's toe, and the result is the same—he is a captive." He spoke lightly, cynically, as one well versed in women's wiles.

Antonia thought for several seconds in silence. " But the man I mean is not vain or tired or affectionate," she answered rebelliously.

Radini shrugged his shoulders. " Then he must have some other weakness."

" Of course, he has many—but not that sort. I don't think he can be *made* to care——"

Radini leant forward. " You mean he has an independent mind—that he cannot be wheedled or coaxed, or drawn into the net."

" I mean," Antonia answered, " that when he loves a woman it will be because he *does ;* and no skill or plots or manœuvring on her part will have had anything to do with it."

"Ah!" Radini said. "Then the man you speak of has a character in a thousand. It does exist—yes!—but how rare. If one goes through life as a looker-on, one sees everywhere that it is woman who rules the world—woman who makes up her mind to marry man—woman who knows what she wants—woman who knows what her husband wants—she tells him what it is, and he believes it. Very few men are themselves; they are what some woman has made of them. A few there are—such a man as you describe—whose nature it is to find a woman for himself, unaided. He likes to make all the running, all the love; he likes to pursue, persuade, and finally conquer her—these are the men who satisfy women, keep them happy. Most men are not capable of conducting their own love affairs—they need assistance. So the women get accustomed to this—they lose their ideals—they play a game of 'catch-who-catch-can,' and when they meet the other sort of man—the man we have been discussing—they do not understand him—do not see how wise it would be to leave the game in his hands."

"Ah!" Antonia said, "you imagine that sort of man to be trustworthy and faithful? why, I do not know. I find that he never commits himself, promises nothing."

"Again, how wise!" Radini answered lightly, a cigarette between the fingers clasped round his knee. "Don't you know that it is the people who take promises so seriously that they are afraid of breaking them, who are the ones who keep the unpromised promises, long after those who promise readily have broken theirs into a thousand little pieces?"

Antonia made a gesture of impatience; it was intolerable that Radini should make this man out to

be desirable. How dared he? Every word he said had been to her anger what a whip is to a horse of high mettle.

"There is something Eastern, something pure and mystic in this ideal of love," Radini went on musingly, pursuing his train of thought to the end. "It lifts it out of the ordinary; makes it something more than nature's call for reproduction. It is the Western—the modern—version of the Oriental who pursues to the ends of the earth a pair of lovely eyes, seen for half a second over the white edge of a yashmak. For me that is the real thing—the rest is nothing but animalism and our old friend, propinquity."

That night Antonia went with Prince Radini and his party to a play, and afterwards to supper at the "Abbaye Bohème" for the first time. Raby, who was sitting quietly with another man in the corner, two little dancers perched on the table drinking their champagne and making them laugh—saw her come in with a start of surprise.

There are some women who can go to all the funny places and no one cares—it doesn't seem to matter; and there are others, very few others, for whom it seems a pity. Raby was furious at seeing Antonia in this place, furious with himself, furious with the people who brought her.

In the first glance round Antonia had seen him. As she had supposed, he had no excuse or reason for breaking the engagement with her. It was just cruelty, indifference, caprice. She couldn't bear it—she couldn't. She must do something desperate or collapse.

Up till that moment she had rather regretted pressing Radini earlier in the evening to take her to this

restaurant; she wished that she had gone quietly to bed after the theatre. But now she found herself in brilliant spirits, hot and feverishly excited. She forced Radini to get up and dance with her, declaring that she would dance alone if he refused.

Raby saw them, with amazed regret, gliding up and down the polished stone floor—the muscles of his hands standing up with the tension of his grip on the table. It was intolerable that Antonia should be rubbing shoulders with that woman in the green, cherry-bedecked hat! Antonia breathing the same air as the man with the diamonds in his teeth! Antonia dancing for all these loathly men to criticize!

And then, like a vision, it came to him that all this had happened before—that in some dim, distant past he had watched Antonia dance thus, with hard, cold, brilliant eyes that saw him not; remembered, or seemed to remember in a faint shadowy sort of way, that he had tried to get near her, to touch her hand, to take her away from it all——

As suddenly as it had come the vision departed; it was like a strong light extinguished, leaving him dazed and in utter darkness. He got up rather unsteadily, and pushing one of the dancers gently but firmly away from him, made his way out into the street.

CHAPTER XV

NEXT morning, when Léontine brought in her breakfast, Antonia found that she had not slept at all that night. She had a curious heated sensation all over her, was angry with a dull, slow, burning sort of anger, liable at any time to break out into something fiercer. She would like to have burst into tears, but any tears she might once have possessed had apparently dried up, leaving nothing but hollow, sandy channels. Perhaps if she had had a mother she might have sobbed round her neck—the proper sort of mother is an excellent person to cry upon—but failing this she wanted her own home. She wanted the familiar objects round her—the hotel had become unbearable in her present frame of mind. She looked round, and the rooms that had seemed so friendly yesterday were enemies to-day. The bed hated her, and she hated *it;* the carpet did not respond comfortingly to the touch of her feet; the curtains did nothing to shade her eyes; the furniture was like a row of gaolers, gaunt and stiff.

She must get back to the spot where she knew everything by heart—where the objects all around her were close friends and intimates. It was rather typical of Antonia's life, this creeping back to an empty house.

In a very few hours Léontine had packed and they were on their homeward journey, Antonia having decided that now the wedding was over there was

nothing to keep her in Paris, the fact that she had previously intended to stay a fortnight mattering not one jot.

Meanwhile Raby had awakened in a far more philosophical spirit. He had hated seeing Antonia in that place, above everything seeing her dance there; he couldn't imagine what had come over her to make her do anything so wild and impossible. But as he had no right to interfere, he had merely gone away, unable to bear it any longer. When she belonged to him, he would take care that she never did anything like it again.

What he did think very strange was the powerful impression he had received of having been through it all with her before, but he didn't pretend to understand it.

The same sort of thing had occurred several times in relation to Antonia. He knew it was explained scientifically as being some sort of reflex action of the brain—he had no other explanation to offer.

As to not having taken Antonia out the night before, he did not regret it. He knew it would have been almost an impossibility. Neither did it occur to him that he ought at least to have furnished some excuse or explanation or apology; that Antonia, seeing him at the "Abbaye Bohème," would certainly not understand the situation. He hated explanations, thought them futile and misleading; he imagined she would simply think that for some very good reason he had been unable to go.

All that day he never tried to communicate with her, but the day after he rang her up, just to hear her voice on the telephone. He was informed that she had gone back to England.

It was fully a week later that Raby himself returned to London. It happened that two or three months before Antonia had lent him a horse to hack in the Park; she wanted him to keep it exercised for her. He had had it over in Paris, riding in the Bois, and had it sent back to England before him, and quite inexplicably it had suddenly gone lame in the stable. Raby was considerably annoyed at this; he determined to go round and tell her at once.

All thought of the evening in Paris had faded from his memory; he went there with a single thought in his head—to tell Antonia that the horse had gone lame.

She was sitting in her own room about six o'clock one evening when the butler announced that Mr. Stigand was in the lac drawing-room. She got up and went slowly down, her eyes stony, her heart beating fast. Her anger had never left her—it gripped her like an illness, making her feverish, sleepless, nerve-racked. She had never felt anything like it since the time she had tried to commit suicide because John Orlebar would not allow her to marry Adam.

But she was willing now—as a woman always *is* willing—to listen to an excuse from the man who matters. She wanted to think it was all right, was only too anxious to be convinced.

She went slowly into the room without greeting or salutation. Raby noticed nothing unusual; his mind was occupied with one thing—the horse. He came from the mantelpiece to the edge of the hearthrug and stood there with his hands in his pockets, telling the story. He was really worried; he couldn't understand how it had happened; he hoped it was no carelessness on the part of his groom.

Antonia had had no idea of the purport of his visit;

she thought that now at least she was to have a tardy explanation of the strange behaviour of the week before. But apparently Raby had never given it a second thought, had dismissed it as a matter of no consequence. It had caused her a week of sleepless nights, but he had never thought twice of it. Antonia's dull anger leapt into a sudden flame ; she was unnerved, overwrought. Something came over her—a sort of rage—utterly distinct from a mere vulgar brawl. She wanted to hurt Raby—to make chaos—to do something. She stamped her foot suddenly, interrupting his explanations. "Do you think I care if the horse is *dead?*" she said in a low voice. "I wish he'd die a thousand deaths."

There was a slight pause—a moment of intense surprise ; then Raby laughed and swung round on his heel. Her unexpected outburst had amused him.

Suddenly Antonia felt something under her hand—she had been standing near a cabinet strewn with knick-knacks. She didn't know what it was, hardly knew what she was doing—but without a second's hesitation, she had seized an Oriental china vase and flung it—not *at* Raby—but just past him, to the ground. It skimmed the outline of his lean brown cheek and crashed against the foot of the stone mantelpiece beyond.

He turned, laughing with a catch in his breath, his eyes bright with excitement.

"You little devil," he said quietly—but he spoke as a man might speak whose son had done something reckless and unexpected and somehow fine.

Across the room they stood and looked at each other, Antonia's head thrown back, her eyes a grey, cold blaze, her lips trembling and parted. And then

something came to her—a slight conception of what it all meant.

A bright red stain began to appear on her neck and crept up till it suffused her face. She raised her hands slowly and covered her eyes with them, leaving Raby frightened at the strength of his own feelings. He thought that the sight of her standing there, her face buried in her hands, was the sweetest thing he had ever seen in his life.

He pulled her two hands roughly away from her eyes and let them go. "What's it all about?"

Antonia thought he was angry. "Raby—why—why did you treat me like that in Paris?"

She was weak now, her eyes wet with tears; there was no attempt at deceiving him.

A sudden comprehension dawned on Raby. He knew women hated his being casual, but Daisy Post and one or two others had got him into the way of expecting them all to ask no questions and put up with anything. Besides, as he had cared nothing for them really, they had been unable to affect him one way or the other.

"Tonita—do you suppose I ever thought you'd mind? I wanted to come, but I couldn't. Didn't you know that? You ought to have known it. I imagined you might be momentarily annoyed, but I never dreamt you'd *care*. I simply thought you found me useful as a sort of lap-dog."

He was afraid of taking too much for granted, afraid of understanding too little.

"I couldn't bear to think you treated me badly," Antonia said tearfully. She was tired now, done up, white and worn out with emotion.

Raby looked hard at her, took her hands and let

them go abruptly. "How did I know you'd mind?" He was blunt to the verge of crudeness.

Antonia looked at him and understood; they looked at each other—and understood.

Far away in the house they heard the peculiar swing to of the studio door. When Adam came into the room he found Antonia in the act of ringing the bell.

"Adam, I've broken a vase; I'm so sorry. I was just ringing to have the pieces taken away."

Adam looked from the cabinet to the vase; if he thought them a long way from each other he made no comment.

"The pair to it is on that crowded window-sill on the stairs," he said meditatively. "I don't think it's wanted there." He went out of the room in his slow soft way, intent on fetching it.

Antonia leaned her back against the wall and spread out her hands to Raby with a gesture that seemed to say, "What do you think of me now?" All the dash and fire and defiance had died out of her face; her eyes were large and dark with a pathetic appealing expression. As always, she had nothing to say for herself—no excuse, no explanation.

Raby came over to her quickly. "I'll try not to annoy you again, Tonita. Only don't ask too much of me—don't expect more of me than I can stand. Oh! it's no use explaining—only I told you in the beginning I should never make a good lap-dog. Didn't I? didn't I? Please forgive me if I hurt you." He took her two hands, turned them palm upwards and kissed them slowly one after the other.

Adam came in carrying the twin vase, which he placed carefully on the cabinet, and a few minutes

later Raby took his departure, leaving Adam and his wife together.

In the week or so that followed Raby and Antonia did not meet, wrote each other no explanations. It was unnecessary—they understood.

But Antonia had received a shock which gave her furiously to think; she felt lonely, insecure. She was frightened of herself, afraid of the future, terrified of growing old. She wanted something to hold on to, something to keep her at home, an object on which to lavish affection.

She made up her mind that only a child would satisfy her longings, and decided to ask Adam to allow her to adopt one. He showed no surprise or emotion when she asked him, and after considering it carefully for twenty-four hours he gave his consent, stipulating only that it should be a healthy child. He then proceeded in his precise orderly way to arrange what rooms should be allotted to it—and left the furnishing of them to Antonia.

When all this was settled in her own mind Antonia wrote to Raby quite simply and naturally, asking him to come to lunch. They were to be six: Lady Susan Wing, Mrs. Lafone, Iselar Radini, Count Muhlenkauf, a German diplomat who had been a friend of the Chaines in Berlin, herself and Raby.

Antonia was very fond of Muhlenkauf; he was fat and bluff, and a character. He wore pince-nez, had a quizzical expression, a delicate understanding of human nature, and at the same time a taste for stories of the Georgian type of humour. Because of his personality his stories had to be permitted him—indeed, were always permitted him in whatever circle he found himself. Antonia disliked them heartily,

but she liked all the rest of him ; she would try to ward them off by every ruse in her power, but when it became no longer possible, she had to laugh and shrug her shoulders.

Muhlenkauf was very well aware of Mrs. Chaine's attitude ; sometimes he would be good on purpose, and sometimes the devil got into him and he would say things he " didn't ought " on purpose to see her laugh and say nothing. It fascinated him, Antonia's way of sweeping her cheeks with her eyelashes and keeping silence. No other woman could do it with the same effect.

This particular day he was very good until the end of luncheon, and then he remembered a story he had heard at Newmarket the day before. It may have been very old, but it convulsed him—nothing would do but he must repeat it to them all. He looked round the table gurgling with merriment. " There are no young girls here," he remarked in his thick German accent. " All the ladies are married, *nicht?*—and the men——"

He seemed to think that no amount of stories could do the men's morals any harm.

Antonia looked across at Susan Wing and laughed, showing her small white teeth.

" There are some things we shouldn't want to hear if we had been married *twice*."

Her remark caused a slight delay, but there was to be no real escape. Muhlenkauf was determined they should not miss anything he thought so good. It turned out to be the story of a certain young lady of Hebrew extraction, who, on bidding a short farewell to her penniless lover on the eve of her marriage with a rich man, reproved him mildly for being glum and

downhearted. "Vy do you look like dat, tear?" she said, down her long nose. "With *our* love and *'is* money, think vat a time ve vill 'ave."

"*Our* love and *'is* money!" Muhlenkauf thought it excruciatingly funny.

For a second neither Antonia nor Raby laughed, and something drew their eyes to each other. It was like a person who goes stealthily to a cupboard in the dark and finds someone else intent on the same errand. Then they fixed them on the story-teller, Antonia with a flush on her cheeks, Raby cool and sardonic.

"How sordid and horrible it sounds," Susan Wing said, half choking between a laugh and a grape pip.

"Put that way it's—it's dreadful," Rosie Lafone volunteered, her eyes sparkling with fun.

The person who had enjoyed it most of all in his quiet way, was Radini; in his character of looker-on he had somehow managed to locate the man whom Antonia had professed to "hate."

After luncheon Raby waited for the others to go away one by one. When at last they were alone it seemed like a quiet Paradise.

"What are you doing this afternoon? Can I do it with you?" He was standing by the mantelpiece in Antonia's sitting-room trying to make her ridiculous little French clock tell the truth.

"It wouldn't amuse you," Antonia said, swinging the tassel of the blind against the window-pane.

"Yes, it would. What is it?"

"I'm going to an orphanage."

"Heavens! another bazaar?"

"No—I'm going to try and find a child."

Raby put down the tiny key he was toying with.

"What for?" he said sharply.

" I'm going to adopt one."

He folded his arms and leant against the mantelshelf. " Will you tell me why ? " His voice was very quiet.

" Why ? " Antonia turned from the window. " Because I'm frightened, terrified of the future." She turned to the window again, restlessly reverting her attention to the blind tassel. " If only I knew I was going to die at thirty-five."

" Tonita—how *dare* you say it ? "

Antonia sank into the window seat. " You won't understand as you are not a woman. But don't you see, my amusements don't amuse me so very much now, and what else have I got ? What will it be later when the lights begin turning down for me and the audience creep away one by one." She was twisting her handkerchief between her fingers. " I want a child. I wish I could have six of them—*they* don't expect their mothers to be always beautiful and brilliant ; they only expect them to be loving and sympathetic. I think I could achieve that with practice. I want someone besides myself to think about and live for and look after. If you only knew how tired I am of myself and my cold impersonal charities."

Raby watched her while a lump rose in his throat —she looked so small and slight and pathetic framed against the red damask of curtains and window seat, her clinging black dress, bare to the elbows, showing her white arms. She was not crying—she was perfectly calm and controlled—but he knew she was speaking from the very innermost depths of her heart.

Suddenly he took a swift step towards her and pulled her up, putting his arms tight round her, pin-

ning her arms to her side. "Tonita—I never knew I could care about anyone in the world as I care for you."

They stood looking at each other for several seconds, and then Antonia gave a sigh of pure happiness.

"Raby!"

"Yes. I have let you go on saying these things because it hurts me so to hear you. I wanted to see how much I minded seeing you frightened, unhappy."

Antonia laid her head against his arm—her eyes large and excited. "She—who—must—be—obeyed?" she said, but quite comfortably, not raising her head. She felt that nothing could matter now.

"Oh, yes—we'll talk about that later. What we have now to discuss is this: you talk of your future—well, it's mine. Our futures are bound up together. There is nothing in the world that could happen to you, Tonita, that wouldn't happen to me too—through you. So you must arrange at once to institute proceedings for the annulment of your marriage with Adam, so that you can marry me. You will get it easily, of course."

Antonia disengaged herself slowly from his arms. "Annulment—of—my—marriage." She pushed her hair back from her forehead and leant up against the mantelpiece—the blood mounting to her forehead. "Do you think I'd dream of humiliating Adam like that? You don't know what he has done for me, how good he has been."

"I'm not thinking of Adam at all—I'm thinking of what is best for you. There will be no disgrace in that for you. Of course, there will be a certain amount of publicity, but I'm afraid that will have to be gone through. It's the simplest way out of the difficulty."

Antonia sat down on a chair, her hands folded in her lap. Her face was quite white now, and set and determined. She seemed to be making up her mind to speak.

"I suppose according to the conventional outlook I could do that," she said at last; "but what is the use of the conventional outlook when one knows oneself that it is not the true one? Don't you see how utterly dishonest that would be, how unjust and unfair to Adam? It would be just as unscrupulous a way of getting rid of him as shooting him with a revolver."

A faint glimmering of light dawned on Raby's intelligence, but he was still far from understanding.

"Explain," he said briefly.

Antonia fidgeted, winding her handkerchief in and out her fingers and unwinding it again. She hated to have to explain. "When I married Adam," she began unevenly, "I didn't know anything. Still, I was determined to marry him—I tried to commit suicide when they wouldn't allow it. He didn't particularly want to marry me. I made him—I had an infatuation for him. Now, I consider that Adam has always played the game by me; he has never failed me. Supposing that, having married me—ignorant as I was—he had proceeded to—to—claim his rights——"

"Privileges," Raby ejaculated softly.

A faint flush crept up Antonia's neck, but she faced him calmly. "Well, call it what you like—if Adam had done *that, then* I should think he committed a breach of contract—do you understand?"

Raby was eyeing her curiously. "Lots of men have married innocent girls—what do they do?"

Antonia was playing with a ring on her finger. "I

suppose they make love to them first and get some response—it paves the way."

"Then it seems to me that where Adam is lacking is in never having made love to you."

Antonia laughed gently. "It would have been useless—and all wrong. He spared us both a painful experience."

"Is he as repulsive to you as that?"

"No—you don't understand. Oh, it isn't fair to Adam to talk him over like this. It's a thing I never meant to do—never. Adam ought not to be considered as a body at all—he is a mind, a genius—there is nothing physical about him. It isn't that he is repulsive to me—I just couldn't consider him that way at all."

"And if you had had to, Tonita?" Raby said gravely.

Antonia was looking away into space. "I should have died of terror."

Raby was watching her, his heart beating fast. She looked up and met his eyes. "So, don't you see, I've been thankful every day of my life that Adam, being Adam, has behaved to me like this. I think he's always played the game. To sue him now and bring him up in a court of justice would be like suing a person who had tried hard to be honest, because he had not stolen one's pearls?"

"Perhaps he never wanted the pearls?"

"I don't know, I'm sure; I don't think he did. But, anyway, I didn't want him to have them either."

"I suppose it's logical—involved as your logic is. Do you suppose that Adam knows how you have felt all these years?"

"I believe he knows everything."

"How? Have you discussed it?"

"No—oh, no."

Raby got up and went over to the window.

"So you see," Antonia went on, "I'm eternally grateful to Adam for having married me—because I know I was meant for you from the beginning—meant to love you, I mean. And as I didn't meet you as a girl—should never have met you—how much worse it would have been if I'd married some one else. The same thing would inevitably have happened—I should have loved you—but the complications might have been much worse."

Raby was standing by the window looking out. "I thought women were proverbially unscrupulous in seizing upon any method to gain their own ends," he said meditatively. "It seems to me, Tonita, that you have the most superfine and exquisite scruples."

"You wouldn't think them silly if I had been able to make you understand."

He turned quickly. "I don't think them silly. I have never respected you so much in my life as now. I am only amazed that you have the courage to take the stand you have. Not one woman in a thousand would dare to be true to herself and the truth, as you have."

"How could I look Adam in the face and treat him any other way—knowing what we know of each other?"

"No—*you* couldn't—but other women could. The little devils would soon turn a thing they had been thankful for all their lives into a grievance to serve their own ends."

Antonia laughed; she crept nearer, and her hand closed round Raby's smallest finger.

"What does it matter? Raby—aren't you thankful to Adam, too?"

He turned and looked at her. "I'm so thankful to him that your marriage shall *not* be annulled, even if you begged me to allow it. So now there is only one thing to be done; we must just go away together—and Adam will divorce you. So much the better—there's nothing to wait for now. We could go at once."

Antonia's hand fluttered in his grasp.

"It's impossible."

"Why? Because you don't care enough?"

"Care? I care so much that you are everything in the world to me."

"Then of course it's not impossible."

Antonia came a little nearer. "Say you love me, Raby—say it, say it. I haven't heard it yet. I believe I've been waiting for it for a million years."

"I love you—I'm mad about you. When shall we go?"

"Don't let's talk about that. Wouldn't it have been enough happiness for me to-day to have known you cared?"

"And to-morrow?"

"To-morrow may never come."

"Yet you love me, Antonia?"

"Yes."

"And you want me to love you?"

"Yes."

"Why? To what end? What are you going to do about it?"

Antonia did not answer; he waited a long while for her reply, and then began again to question gently. "Why did you want me to say I loved you?"

"Because I care for *you*. Because I have often lain awake at nights and said to myself—'Just to hear him say it will make me happy for ever.'"

" It wouldn't, though—you don't know."

" It has—I am."

" Yes—and what then ? "

" How do you mean *then ?* "

" What are you going to do with me ? Tonita, you can't mean to shilly-shally between Adam and me—you can't mean me to come and see you every day, and squeeze your hand a little, and tell you how much I love you, and how sad it is we can't marry—and then go away and begin it all over again the following day. You can't mean that."

Antonia got up and walked over to the mantelpiece ; she stood there, her fingers on the ledge, looking fixedly, blindly at a white china and ormolu elephant, her back to Raby and the room.

" Isn't there any other way ? " she said in a low voice.

" Yes," Raby said bluntly. " There's ' our love and 'is money,' as the young lady of Jewish extraction said. Do you fancy it ? "

" You're horrible."

" I meant to be."

He waited a moment, and then went over to her and took her hand. " Let's sit down and begin all over again. We've got wrong somehow. Tonita, goodness knows we haven't rushed into this thing, or made up our minds in an instant. Don't you see, darling, for you and me there is nothing else to be done but go away together, and get married as soon as we can. The only question is—do you care enough to leave Adam and all his money, and go away with a man who has only a place that is far too big for his income ? "

" It isn't that—you know it isn't. I don't care about Adam's money, or where I live. But I made him marry

me, and I promised to play the game. John Orlebar isn't a prude, but he thinks I ought to stick to Adam. He's told me so often and often. He almost frightens me, he's so impressive."

They talked the matter over in all its aspects, backwards and forwards, over and over again—but Antonia never said "yes." He told her how he had cared from the beginning, how he would have given everything he possessed to be the man who found her first, how no other woman had ever mattered or ever would. He told her how it had come about that he had invented "She."

"Invented her!" Antonia said. "Why! I saw her hat. It had a wreath of roses round it."

"Yes," Raby said quietly, "in that sense she has existed—but—but—oh, don't you understand—I don't love her—I have never told her that I love her—she doesn't for one minute think I do—she doesn't love *me*. In that sense I invented her." He thought he was speaking the truth.

Antonia, woman-like, wanted to know more.

"Why didn't you love her?—isn't she pretty?"

"Yes, very, and she's one of the best—but I never loved her, I can't tell you why."

Antonia was silent, thinking.

"Do people—women, I mean—really do—those things—without being in love?"

He nodded.

"Is she poor?"

He followed her train of thought in a flash. "No—not at all—it's nothing of that sort."

"Then why do they do it—for what reason?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "At least three-quarters of the affairs one sees going on around one are loveless.

I can't tell you why, except that the real thing is a very rare and precious flower, not to be found on every bush. So half the world has to be contented with something else, something less."

"I see," Antonia said gravely. She looked like a child solemnly assimilating a new piece of knowledge—but in her heart of hearts she believed that "She" must have loved Raby all the while.

"Yes—but do you understand?"

"I think so."

"You're cold about it?"

"No—only you have hurt me so much sometimes about 'She.' I've suffered tortures of jealousy."

"I've been nearly mad with it sometimes myself."

"I never knew."

"Nor did I. I thought it was only your pride that smarted—I enjoyed that. I thought you didn't mean to care yourself—but you meant to turn me into another lap-dog."

"It isn't true as you put it."

"No—I knew that, when you threw the china thing at me. Tonita, I've never loved anything so much in my life as having that thing thrown at me. I should have told you all this then, only I hadn't the chance. And now, to-day, when you want to adopt a child—I can't let you *adopt* one, Antonia! We must go away together. If you really want me to, I'll wait a little while, but you must promise me that it won't be very long."

There was a silence, and then Antonia said, "I can never do it, Raby. Adam would hate a public scandal more than anything else in the world—I can't repay him that way."

"I thought you'd say that, but you are wrong.

I know it isn't nice for you to do it, that it would hurt Adam, annoy him, hit him in a sensitive part—but all that isn't really a tremendous issue. You have an absurdly exaggerated view of what you owe to Adam. The thing is that we belong to each other—if you don't go with me, you are renouncing everything in life that you have the right to expect, everything natural, everything that really matters, everything in the world for us both."

Antonia sat on and on, unlacing and interlacing her fingers. "You are being a brute to me," she said in a very low voice. "You are simply taking my heart and playing football with it."

"I'm not—I'm not. I'm only trying to make you understand. I want you to give up your mistaken idea of duty."

She turned away restlessly and went to the window looking out over the trees. Raby, watching her, knew instinctively that what she answered then would be the answer he must take.

She turned at last, holding on to the curtain, and just because she felt so much, her voice sounded as if she felt nothing at all. "It can't be done. Please—don't ask me any more."

In his heart of hearts Raby felt that she hadn't the courage to go away, that she couldn't face it all—the scandal, the uncertainty, the social ostracism. He thought all women were rather small, incapable of great sacrifices. Every man has his own notion of womankind—that was Raby's. He felt that if he had met Antonia as a girl, and wooed and married her, that she would have been his ideal, everything he wanted in a woman; he didn't expect a heroine, didn't want one. But he also felt that she wasn't strong enough to take

this great step—he thought there was not a woman in a thousand who would leave all Antonia would be leaving, just for love. If there was one, she would probably have large feet and the character of a man, and be tiresome in other ways. He didn't for a moment admit that it was a flaw in Antonia's character, he did not criticize it—he simply thought that the path was too thorny for her tender feet. Just as a mother does not love her child the less because it refuses to jump from the burning window-sill at her bidding into the safety net below, so Raby never thought of accounting what seemed to him her weakness, against Antonia.

He was unjust to her in thinking her incapable of a great sacrifice, but the injustice was unintentional.

Most women say so much more than they do—when you come right down to it, they dare very little. They love to go to the edge of the precipice and look over, clinging tightly to their foothold and their tuft of grass all the while. Antonia was not like this; she was a woman who did a great deal more than she said, and with a dash and abandon most women never dream of.

But in this instance, in her comparative inexperience, she had not thought out the inevitable ending. For months and months she had longed to hear Raby say he loved her—only to hear him say it!—only to hear him say it! Her thoughts had gone no farther than just the finding of each other. She had not realized that quick on the declaration would come the demand—the demand that she should give her life into his keeping.

This was only characteristic of Raby—only one of the qualities she loved him for; but how often in life are we inconsistent enough to love certain qualities in people and dislike their direct, natural results?

Antonia wasn't ready for this sacrifice, wasn't ripe, wasn't equal to the occasion.

"Very well," Raby said at last, "then there is nothing more to be said. Good-bye, Tonita—we have had some good times together. Thank you for them." As usual, once having made up his mind, he wasted no words or time.

"Raby—like that! You are not going to say good-bye like that? You will come back? Why—you have never—even—kissed—me."

She stood there, outlined against the crimson curtain, her arms opened out. She, too, was playing her last card.

"No!" he said slowly, coming no nearer, "no, I never have, and I think I'd better not."

They looked at each other steadily across a space, and then Antonia turned away, her eyes large and black, her face white and drawn-looking. He knew he was being a brute, knew he was hurting her, but the devil in him urged him on. It was just because he cared so much he behaved in this way; if it had been any other woman she would have had her kiss and been forgotten. He went to the double doors that led into the hall and pulled them towards him to open, turning, when he got outside, to draw them together again. He stood there, with a hand on each knob, looking at Antonia. "So you only wanted me for a lap-dog after all," he said, and he was so miserable that his voice sounded light and ironical. It cut into Antonia's heart like a whip across the cheek. He waited a second for an answer, and receiving none, closed the door gently and went away.

Antonia turned and ran quickly towards the doors—she very nearly flung them open and called to him

to come back—but instead, her hands dropped listlessly away from the door-handles. She just knew enough to keep silent when there was nothing more to be said.

She looked at the clock, feeling strangely calm and strong; the storm in her had not burst yet—it was all pent-up, gathering force.

She went briskly up to her room, rang for her maid, put on her hat and veil and gloves, and went down and got into the waiting motor, giving as directions "St. James's Orphanage."

She was like a piece of machinery that, being wound up, has to go till it runs down.

More than ever, more than ever now, she said to herself, she must have a child to look after and live for.

At the Orphanage that afternoon Antonia looked round, bewildered, upon forty little upturned faces—she looked so much that she lost her sense of perception. She didn't know what she wanted—she only knew that none of these were what she meant. Their cheeks were red instead of pink, or their noses were impossible, or their eyes were small and expressionless, or their hands were blunt and thick. Antonia had dreamed of something with great wide liquid eyes, golden hair, and a soft, white, velvety skin made for kissing. She turned to the matron irresolutely. "What am I to do? I am afraid I don't see just the sort of child I meant."

"You said they must be whole and healthy and strong?" the matron said tentatively.

Antonia clutched at a straw. "Why? Have you one that is ill? Do let me see it?"

They climbed the stairs together. "Timmy isn't

ill exactly," the matron said by way of explanation, " he was born with twisted feet."

Antonia drew in her breath sharply—a bodily deformity aroused all her pity, made her miserable.

" Is it incurable ? "

" I'm afraid so—at least, I don't know. If he could have all the baths and massage and electricity the doctors advise, he might be entirely cured. But how can he have them here, poor lamb ? "

" Who were his people ? "

" I don't know—no one knows. It is believed his mother was a young governess who drowned herself. He was found in a station waiting-room."

They went into a long dormitory and stopped beside a horsehair sofa near the window. A child of five lay there, a pillow at his back, a tin soldier in his thin hands.

He had a soft mass of cropped brown hair, blue eyes, and a mouth carved like a bow. His nose was very small and straight, and the veins showed through the delicate skin on his temples. He was not pretty, but his face was full of character.

The matron drew down his blanket gently, and Antonia stood looking at the pathetic little twisted limbs through a veil of tears that had been before her eyes the whole afternoon. She seemed to see nothing but two great blue eyes and two tiny shrunken feet. Suddenly something inside her went snap—gave way. She threw herself on her knees before the couch and buried her face in the coverlet, sobbing her heart out. The matron, watching the scene, saw before her a young, a beautiful, a childless woman, who had already charmed her with her soft voice and sweet manners—weeping passionate tears at the sight of a crippled

orphan. She did not for a moment know what to do—whether to raise and try to soothe the black-robed figure, or leave her to herself. Just then a thin, childish hand stretched itself shyly out to touch the white arm on the counterpane, and stroke it very softly. The matron tiptoed away, leaving them alone together. She thought—as naturally she would think, as anyone would think—that Mrs. Chaine was crying, partly out of pity for the twisted limbs, but mostly because she wanted a child of her own.

When Antonia left the Orphanage she took Timmy with her, on a visit, pending the final settlement of his affairs. He had stroked his little way into her heart, had appealed to her, was sympathetic to her nature.

When people say they don't care for children, it means that they have never met their affinity in a child. Antonia had found hers, and she meant to keep him. She made up her mind that she would devote all her time and energy to getting him well—it would be something worth doing, something that would just keep her interest in the world alive. She felt that nothing less would be any good.

But for the first time in her life she was afraid to meet Adam, for with his horror of bodily ailments she could not imagine what he might not say to a cripple? So it transpired that Timmy had been in the house for days before Antonia had the courage to display him, and then a means of doing it came to her in a flash.

She came in one day to find him lying on a Charles II carved oak day-bed, coloured rays from a stained-glass window behind him shedding a curious light here and there on his little head. His hair had been cut round like a child in an early Florentine picture—he looked extraordinarily quaint, and somehow mystical.

Suddenly an idea came to her—she threw a large piece of old Spanish embroidery over his legs and sent for Adam. At the last moment, as a sort of inspiration, she put into his hands a crystal ball. When Adam came in he was gazing at himself in the crystal with wonder and interest and admiration.

Adam watched him for a minute, suddenly arrested—and then he laughed. Antonia, looking round, saw his eyes were keen and bright and cold. She knew the look—it was the artist gleam. Adam was not thinking of the *child*, but the *picture*.

"Where did you find him?"

"Isn't he nice?"

"Wonderful—don't let him move." Adam was twisting his head this way and that.

Antonia took her courage in both hands. "His legs are not quite straight," she said firmly, "but the doctors have every hope of their getting perfectly well."

"Keep that coverlet on. Don't let him move. I shall make a picture of that—he looks like an infant Galileo."

From that moment onwards Timmy became an accepted inmate of the Chaine household.

A week later Antonia heard that Raby Stigand had gone to California.

CHAPTER XVI

FROM the time of Timmy's adoption, for the next two years Antonia never moved without him. Wherever she went, he went too; often they travelled abroad together for the sake of Timmy's health.

All the care he had received, the treatments, the massage, had worked wonders. He could run about now, although his feet were not yet quite straight; he could ride a pony and play with other children.

Many things had happened to Antonia, but mostly unimportant social things. In character she had strengthened and settled—she gave one the idea of a woman who knew what she wanted and was unafraid. More than ever people fell in love with her—men, women, and children.

She was simpler in character, too, somehow or other, since the advent of Timmy; it seemed to draw people nearer to her. In the old days she had had an almost unattainable idea of perfection—quite unattainable, in fact, for anyone less beautiful than herself. Even for herself it meant being continually tuned up to concert pitch; but women seem to be able to put up with concert pitch much better than men. She had looked upon her body as something that must always be presented to the world in its fullest perfection; if she had had a cold in the head, for instance, she would have shut herself away, would have suffered any disappointment rather than appear with it. She would

have hated to look the least bit hot, or the least bit blue with cold; she would have hated her hair to have been anything short of perfection in its soft, shining waves, or her hands to have been the least bit roughened or sunburnt.

When she had stayed away sometimes as a guest in other people's houses, her firm way of saying "good night" to hostess and fellow-guests on the threshold of her room had often been remarked upon. Mrs. Chaine seemed to make it so very clear that she had no desire whatever for their presence in the intimacy beyond the doormat. Especially to women she had felt this intense reserve—to men perhaps not so much—to Raby never.

The giddy heights of her physical perfections had been almost alarming to some of her friends—much as a specially exquisite bloom on a bunch of grapes makes one almost reluctant to touch it. A flaw in her beauty, a disadvantageous movement would have put them at their ease at once—made her seem less of a goddess, more of a woman.

And this subtle change in Antonia had actually happened—the child about the house had done it. She never could look anything but beautiful, it was a physical impossibility; but in these days she forgot about herself. She would cram an old hat on her head and go out in the battering wind and rain, glorying in the havoc it made of her neat head. She rowed on the lake with hands and arms bare to the elbow, and if there was anything the matter with her, a headache or any other indisposition which confined her to her rooms, the whole household walked in and out, recommending their own particular remedies, fussing and petting her. It was extraordinary how people minded when Antonia

was ill—how they fetched and carried, and tiptoed and whispered, unasked.

Antonia had taken them into her confidence in these days—had given up being a hermit.

Freddy Ramsden, for one, had never loved her so much in his life as the day he found her in the sitting-room off her bedroom, just returned from hunting, her nose and chin slightly greased because of the cutting wind, and Léontine and she nearly crying together over a top-boot which could not be drawn off because of a blistered foot inside.

Only her *opinions* Antonia kept firmly to herself as much as ever—her opinions and thoughts and sorrows and dreams.

She had suffered tortures after Raby went away—tortures of restlessness and loneliness and misery, unguessed by anyone. She went through strange phases; for months together she hated cities, could not bear to go to London. "I'm crazy about my chickens," she would say, rattling about with a bunch of keys and plates of Indian corn. "Timmy and I can't bear to leave them."

So she stayed on and on at Adam's place in Dorsetshire, and really fed the chickens in an odd, methodical, dispassionate way, though if anyone had looked at her eyes and seen them clouded with vague thoughts and dreams, they would have doubted if the poultry really amused her as much as she would have them believe. Again she longed for Scotland, and spent months living on the moors, riding about with Tim—and once she took him to Swiss mountain tops, and once to stay with Michel and Gemma.

In the relationship between Adam and herself slow changes had taken place—so slow and gradual that she

had failed to attach any importance to them—had barely noticed or wondered.

More and more she had been left to herself; it was nothing unusual if she did not see Adam for days. At one time they had always taken meals together; now, as often as not, Adam had meals in his own rooms. She had even found herself wondering at times if he could be ill; but there was no hint of illness in the air, and the subject was tabooed as much as ever. Sometimes she had been vaguely startled by a grey, weary look on his face, but the next moment he had been his usual self, quizzical and caustic. In mind he remained very much the same; when he appeared, he was generally pretty good company, observant, amusing, even witty.

Antonia attributed his frequent withdrawals to lack of interest; she thought that he often got bored with her, that in certain moods he would be bored with anyone.

The only thing that happened which seemed of any importance was when Raby's mother asked her to come and stay. Just before going away, Raby had told his mother, quite quietly, that Antonia Chaine was the only woman he had ever cared about, or ever would.

Mrs. Stigand did not disapprove or bewail or lecture; she listened, and made very few comments. He told her the facts about the Chaine marriage, and that Antonia had definitely refused either to run away with him or consider the question of getting her marriage annulled, and he asked her, if anything of importance happened in Antonia's life, to let him know.

To say that Mrs. Stigand was not immensely relieved that Antonia refused to run away with Raby would be untrue. She had all her life dreamt too many dreams

of his marrying some charming girl in the most satisfactory manner possible, to be able to welcome at a moment's notice anything in the shape of divorce, or annulment, or any other irregularity.

Nevertheless, unlike most mothers whose children never grow up, to Mrs. Stigand, Raby was a man; she had no wish, had never had any wish, to trifle with him and belittle his character. Whatever he had done she would simply have been loyal to him—just as some women are loyal to their husbands even when they make mistakes.

She was of the type of woman whose dearest recollections of her son were not his curls or his first shoe—but his first fight, his first rabbit, and his cricket matches. She had played cricket herself, and loved it. From the time he was four, Raby had been allowed a big hunting-knife of his own, and from the time he was eight, a gun.

But it was after he had gone away to California this time that Mrs. Stigand felt instinctively that the crisis in her son's life meant more than she had at first realized. Nothing, she knew now, would ever again be quite as it had been hitherto. She and he had turned another corner of that long road called "Life," and already the pathway behind them that they had trodden more or less together was out of sight round the bend. Optimistic as she was by nature, it made her feel lonely and old. She wanted to keep in touch with her son's interests and dearest concerns—it was all she had to live for, nothing else really mattered. Up till now she had felt that all that was most precious to him was represented by "Mullions," but now there was something else, infinitely nearer and more personal.

As a girl, Mrs. Stigand had been one of the few who

could pick and choose among their lovers, selecting their husbands for themselves. Her physical attributes had been a small, almost boyish head, two wonderful brown eyes, and a slow, graceful carriage. These, allied to a force of character and a dangerously quiet fascination and independence, had done great damage among the beaux of her own day. In the age when women did not go in for sport in the wholesale fashion they do now, Beatrice Tranby was good at everything. She and the elder Raby had met and fallen in love in the hunting-field. He had been one of the best men in England across country, and yet, try as he would to outdo her, this girl was always just behind him. It piqued him, irritated him, excited alternately his admiration and annoyance. In the end he nearly killed her, because she wouldn't give in and he wouldn't give up. But in the *very* end they got married. Mrs. Stigand had not yet grown old enough to forget what a man and a woman could be to each other.

Probably it was the remembrance of it that made her want, more than anything else in the world, once Raby had gone away, to see the woman he had set his heart upon—not only to see her, but to know her.

She had heard that she was very beautiful; but Raby had seen beautiful women before—she wanted to know the personality behind.

At last she wrote to Antonia—it seemed the only way. It was characteristic of her to offer no explanation for the action. "My dear," she wrote, "Will you come and stay with me? Perhaps Raby has spoken to you of his mother. Can you find time in your busy life to give an old woman the opportunity of making your acquaintance?"

When Antonia received the invitation she thought

she was in a thousand minds about going; as a matter of fact her mind had been made up at once—she couldn't keep away. So she and Timmy went hand in hand to stay at "Mullions," in the little wing Raby kept open for his mother; and the visit was such a brilliant success that it was repeated two or three times a year.

Mrs. Stigand and Antonia, both being women who hated the obvious things in life, were almost laconic to each other at meeting—and then they grew to care.

At first sight Antonia had known that Mrs. Stigand was the mother she used to see in her childish days—Tomaki's mother—but she said nothing of it just then; while Mrs. Stigand, on her side, admiring Antonia without reserve, would nevertheless end a conversation or dismiss her abruptly, if she felt inclined. To those who did not understand her, Mrs. Stigand's manners were sometimes inclined to be alarming.

But Antonia never minded—she liked original people—had probed the real worth and quality beneath.

As they got to know each other better, the older woman would often sit in Antonia's room at night, watching her long hair being taken down and brushed out. She liked Antonia's dressing-gowns, and pretty nightdresses, and dainty toilet paraphernalia; she would have hated any physical hurt to have happened to her as a man would have hated it.

Once she wrote a letter to Raby, telling him she thought the woman he loved the most beautiful thing that ever happened. "Her wrists, Raby," she wrote, "even her wrists, are the prettiest things"—and then she tore it up. She would not mention Antonia unless something untoward had happened—that was the tacit understanding.

At " Mullions," Antonia was the easiest guest in the world to amuse ; she wandered about happily all day long, asking nothing better than never to be taken away from the place for an hour. The key of the safe containing the old historical documents of the house had been given to her ; they were a dusty, musty collection of papers, some bearing seals, some the signatures of kings long dead and gone, some illuminated, many almost illegible. Antonia would go round, one of these in her hand, making out for herself exactly how the original wing, built in the time of Edward III and containing the banqueting hall, had been added to in 1560, and yet again in the reign of Charles II.

She knew by heart all the powder closets and secret staircases and sliding panels, had read up the histories of all the Stigands whose faces attracted her, looking down from their canvases in the long gallery. Antonia loved tradition, felt happy and content in a house with a past—it fascinated her, gave her endless food for dreams. The only thing, perhaps, in which Adam could be said to show his American origin, was in his liking for a modern house. He had a passion for old things, but liked a new house to put them in. The Chaines' house in the country, while very admirable in its own way, was absolutely modern, built on an old site. Antonia could never help having a secret contempt for its newness and utter lack of association.

At " Mullions " she loved the spot in the gardens where a Royalist Stigand had been captured by the Roundheads in the Civil War, after dodging his pursuers round the maze of yew hedges ; loved the room and the box and the dice where another Stigand, in early Georgian days, had laid a wager with a miser named Penrose—his daughter's hand for the much-

coveted property of "Mullions." Geoffrey Stigand had won, and Barbara Penrose's happy face shone down from its place in the long gallery.

But above and beyond all these things there were Raby's own intimately personal belongings to touch and gaze at—Raby's fishes stuffed in cases, Raby's records of sport and games, Raby's polo ponies, Raby's gun-room, the nurseries he played in as a little boy.

One day she came to Mrs. Stigand, a battered wooden toy tiger in her hand—she had found it in the nursery cupboard. "Did you ever tie it round his neck with a blue ribbon?"

Mrs. Stigand was surprised—she hadn't seen the tiger for years—but with the sight of it long-forgotten scenes came back to her memory. "Yes, I did," she said quickly, after an astonished pause; "Raby couldn't sleep without it when he was ill. But how did you know?"

"I dreamt about it," Antonia said vaguely—the whole truth was something between Raby and herself, that nobody else had any right to know. "Ill, did you say? Was he ever ill?"

For a long time it had puzzled her very much that Raby, being nine years older than herself, should have been her playmate in her day-dreams when she was four or five. At thirteen and fourteen years of age boys as a rule have no use for little girls.

She found the explanation in his mother's answer. It seemed that when Raby was at his preparatory school he had fallen off a wall and injured his spine. It grew perfectly well afterwards, but for nearly two years he lay on his back in a long chair, an invalid. Then it was that he told his mother he could not bear to think of other boys, and what they were doing—it made

him feel utterly miserable, a log, a baby. So he invented a little girl in his own mind, to play with. "I may be useless to the other fellows," he said to his mother contemptuously, "but I shall be better than a girl anyway." He bullied his playmate, frightened her, teased her with the tiger, and swashbuckled generally, becoming a Red Indian, a pirate, and a cannibal king in turn.

And then one day it seemed that the little girl fell ill. Raby's mother always thought it must have been his own sufferings that made him play that game; she remembered thinking it so curious in a child. While she was ill Raby held her hand, made her drink her medicine; for hours together he forbade anyone to speak in the room for fear of disturbing her. "No grown man," Mrs. Stigand said, "could have been more attentive to a woman." The little girl got well, and soon after Raby himself became quite restored to health. From the moment he put his foot to the ground, the other child had been forgotten. Mrs. Stigand had never heard of her again from that time to this. It was only the sight of the ancient, battered tiger that brought the whole thing back to her memory. Antonia listened to the story, fascinated; it revived strange, floating, elusive memories. Vividly she remembered being the terrified squatter's wife, waiting to be scalped by a fearsome Red Indian; vaguely she remembered the illness, and how Tomaki had said that she mustn't die, as she wouldn't go to heaven.

It was during this visit to "Mullions" that Mrs. Stigand fell in love with Timmy. She had a great weakness for small boys, and Timmy was a particularly lovable, attractive child. Moreover, his pathetic story had made her eyes fill with tears, and there and then

she had adopted him as a grandchild. "Why shouldn't he have a grandmother?" she said; "other children have."

Every three or four months an invitation for Timmy was included in Antonia's, "to come and stay a few days." There was always some charming excuse for asking them so often. Antonia must come and see her new rose-garden—it was a perfect picture; or would they come and save her from the prospect of a lonely week; or they had found some wonderful Roman coins in the well; Antonia, she knew, would be interested.

And then, strangely enough, one day an invitation came for Timmy alone. "Would Antonia spare the grandson to his old grandmother? She wanted him very badly."

As a P.S. came the information that Raby had come home for a few months.

Antonia understood the situation perfectly. Now that Raby had come back, it was, of course, impossible for her to go; but that did not prevent Mrs. Stigand longing for the boy.

She sat down and wrote a letter.

"Dear Mother-Bee," it ran. Antonia always called her Mother-Bee, because her name was Bee, or Beatrice.

> "Your son disliked so much the idea of my adopting a child—tried so hard to dissuade me—would it be very tactful of me, do you think, to let Timmy go to his house? I leave you to decide—you always know.
>
> "With love from us both,
>
> "Your devoted
>
> "ANTONIA."

Mrs. Stigand answered that Raby was much away. If he ever saw him, which was very doubtful, he would certainly not take the trouble to inquire further about him—would merely assume that he was one of his mother's little friends.

So Antonia let the child go. She wanted to; it was like sending a dove out of the ark to see what it would bring back. After Timmy's departure she went up to London herself and waited, hoping that Raby would come and see her. At his old favourite hours for calling, she somehow always found herself at home—about eleven in the morning, or six in the evening—but he never came.

Then Timmy arrived back from his visit, and Antonia went to meet him at the station, white with excitement, her hands shaking, her knees unsteady and rather unserviceable. All the way home in the motor Timmy chattered without stopping; he had ridden the pony; he had had tea with Mrs. Bucket, the gamekeeper's wife; she had given him hot scones and Cornish cream; Simon, the carpenter, had made a little cart for Laddie, the Newfoundland; Laddie hadn't much cared for the cart, but he, Timmy, had adored it; he had been to a village cricket match and drunk ginger beer instead of tea, and oh!—joy of joys!—he had got up early this last morning as ever was, and had helped Moxon, the gardener, to cart "manoor."

Antonia listened feverishly; she drank in every word he said, but she wondered if he would ever mention Raby. Had he seen him? Had he spoken to him? She longed to ask him point-blank, but her nerve failed her. Arrived at the house, she took him to her own room for tea—the hot scones and the Cornish cream

had in no way impaired his digestion or his appetite, though, according to all theories on children's diet, they ought to have. Between mouthfuls of bread and jam he flung more tit-bits of information at Antonia. Two village boys had torn a frog to pieces—they called it "dissection," Timmy called it wicked; Grandmother-Bee had grown a new carnation—Adam would call it "blue" he felt sure—Adam was so funny about colours—really, it was mauve; and oh! oh!—he had suddenly remembered he had left a bowl of gold-fishes in the train; the water had slopped over an old lady's toe when the train jolted, and the old lady was so cross because she thought she'd catch cold, that Fanny, the maid, had put it outside in the corridor, and now it had been forgotten.

Antonia promised that inquiries should be made for the missing fish, and after tea they went upstairs together to the room Timmy now slept in alone, his tutor within earshot.

Antonia unpacked his belongings with her own hands; she did not wish to ring for a servant; she wanted him to herself. Timmy sat on the bed, unrebuked, whittling a stick with his new knife, the shavings all over the nice green carpet, while she arranged his brushes on the dressing-table, his boots in the boot-cupboard, his shirts in the top-drawer, his riding-whip and cricket-bat on a rack on the wall.

Suddenly there was a pause in the unpacking—Antonia had come upon some books and a bundle of letters and a piece of notepaper, covered with hieroglyphics.

"What is this, Timmy?" she said quickly.

"Oh, Raby drew that," Timmy answered calmly, but his eyes grew interested, as if with a recollection.

Antonia's heart fluttered strangely as she held the paper in her hand. It had suddenly come to her that it was *two years*—two long, miserable, empty years since she had last seen Raby—desolately empty except for Timmy.

She pointed to the first object on the paper. "What is that wriggly thing?"

"That's an echo—you know how they go round and back again."

"An echo—and what's this?"

"A man, of course."

"And this?"

"A woman," Timmy laughed. "Can't you see?"

"And this, Timmy?"

"A house."

"And this a squirrel?"

Timmy rocked with laughter. "No—no—no—it's a baby."

"What does it all mean?"

"Don't you see, Honour, *I* made up the story and Raby illustrated it." Timmy always called her "Honour"—he had thought of it himself.

Antonia nearly burst into tears—Raby illustrating! Raby, who couldn't draw a rabbit.

"Tell me the story, Timmy—do tell me?"

"I nearly forgets it now; but there was a little man and a woman living in a house with an echo—you know, like the echo at Mullions! And they had a baby like Harriet Sparrow had when you said I wasn't to call it red."

"Yes, dear—and then?"

"Well, then I wanted them to go to Paradise, but Raby wouldn't draw it. He said that if a little man and a little woman were living in a house with an echo

and had a baby of their own, they were in Paradise already."

"He said that?"

"Yes—so then I asked him to draw the skeleton in the cupboard."

"And did he?"

"Yes, after he did—there it is. But he didn't want to; he said I was a 'blighter.'"

Antonia's arms were tight round his neck—her eyes large and excited.

"Timmy! Timmy! you darling. What a lovely story. Tell me what happened then?"

Timmy knitted up his brows—he wanted to be obliging, but he had really almost forgotten. With a sigh of relief his memory came back to him.

"Then I got a bogey in my nose," he said gravely, and his face looked perfectly angelic.

"Timmy!"

"Raby said I'd better blow it—and then my hanky and your letter all tumbled out of my pocket together."

"Did Raby see it?" She tried to keep the eagerness out of her voice.

"Yes—and he asked me quite quickly who 'Honour' was?"

"Why?"

"'Cos I'd been talking about you, but he didn't know who 'Honour' was. I told him you was Mrs. Chaine."

"What did he say?"

"Nothin'."

"Timmy!"

"No—he didn't say nothin' then, but we talked about you lots. He asked me what I was like when you

'dopted me. I said I was lame. He said he might have known."

Timmy slid off the bed; he was growing impatient. He wanted to see what "Ally," his tutor, was doing in the playroom. But Antonia couldn't let him go—she clung to him, beguiling him with promises, and eventually she found out all she wanted to know.

It seemed that Raby and Timmy had made friends over one of Timmy's naughty tempers. Old Randolph, the stud-groom, had had the pony clipped, and fearing that he might feel very fresh and young with his coat off, had given orders that Timmy was not to be allowed to ride him that day. In the meantime, Timmy couldn't believe that such a tragedy could really happen, and despite all warnings had dressed, as usual, in his breeches and gaiters, and waited at the front door. When he found that the pony was really not coming he was very naughty, to say the least of it. He used violent language—as violent as he knew how; he kicked the toe of his boot almost out against the gravel; in fact, he did everything that was terrible and awful—except cry. Raby, who had been smoking in the small room at the side, came out to see the cause of the commotion.

To Timmy's astonishment, he suddenly found himself warmly supported. "Why shouldn't he have the pony?" Raby seems to have said. "It's all nonsense about making him nervous. I should hate to be thwarted, too, if I was the kid."

From that moment they had become friends. Timmy had gazed round-eyed at his champion, approved, and quietly annexed him, as children have a way of doing. Raby had taken him for rides; he held

the net while Raby fished, and all the time had apparently chattered on, telling him about his home and his pony and his tutor and his "Honour," only, until the moment that his nose felt as if it had a bogey in it and the letter and the hanky bundled out together, Raby had never known, or cared, who that "Honour" was.

The night after the return of Timmy, Antonia never slept for a moment; she lay awake thinking of what Raby had said about Paradise.

When the London season began Mrs. Chaine, who had been in town very little for two years, was now seen about a good deal. People said that she was better-looking than ever, and, if possible, more dreamy —in reality, she was always vaguely searching for one face among the crowd.

But Raby was not doing the season this year; neither was he racing or playing polo. As a matter of fact, if Antonia had only known it, he was on the Continent most of the time, trying to persuade very slow-moving foreign Governments that they would save a vast amount of money, time, and labour, in the transportation of cotton from certain far-distant countries, if they could only arrange between themselves to have the same railway gauge through their separate territories.

The weeks slipped by, and one afternoon Mrs. Chaine's motor turned out of Arlington Street into Piccadilly, going West, Antonia inside, Timmy in his favourite place between the chauffeur and the footman. The sun was blazing down, the traffic dense; carriages moved at a hand's pace; men were in a waistcoatless condition under their conventional town garb; the heat from the pavement was slapping weary foot-

passengers in the face. It was only a week or two before the crowning of the King, and everywhere wooden stands, red baize, policemen, flags, soldiers, dust and sawdust seemed to be scattered broadcast, to the accompaniment of eternal hammering.

Just opposite the Ritz Hotel the crowd was thicker than ever ; people were coming away from late lunches, trying to secure their carriages ; others were pressing onwards on shopping and visiting intent ; the great crowd of workers was hurrying — hurrying. Raby Stigand strolled out from the arches under the Ritz ; he was dressed coolly and unconventionally as if only passing through town on his way to the country. Taking advantage of one-half of the traffic being held up by the arm of the law, he began threading his way in and out between the carriages.

"How can these women stand the racket ?" he thought to himself, as his roving gaze followed car after car, bearing away pink and white faces, feathered hats, lace dresses, gaily-coloured parasols.

Suddenly his attention was arrested by the occupant of an electric landaulet, standing within a yard or two of him ; quicker than it takes to tell there had been the recognition of a familiar silhouette ; with a shock of surprise and emotion, he found himself gazing through the window into Antonia's eyes.

Another second, and she had opened the door of the motor, inviting him to enter ; and then it was, while still coldly undecided, that the whole of Piccadilly seemed to heave and move with the undulating, sinuous movement of two long, dusky snakes aroused from torpor. The detaining arm of the law must have been withdrawn, for a thousand speeds seemed to have been put in, a thousand brakes taken off, a thousand

chariots to be bearing down upon the spot where he stood, doubtful and unyielding.

Then he changed his mind suddenly and got in, slamming the door behind him, or perhaps he didn't change his mind, but merely had no wish to be turned into raspberry jam by the motor-'bus behind.

He settled himself, took off his hat, put it on the floor somewhere between his feet, and turned to look at Antonia.

"How is Mrs. Chaine? But there's no need to ask; she looks—well."

"Thanks, I am. I think you looking thin."

"Oh, that's nothing. Two years of work and so on have taken the *paté de foie gras* off, that's all."

"But you've been back three months."

"How do you know?"

"Your mother told me."

There was a pause that got on Antonia's nerves.

"I was just going down to Ranelagh," she said aimlessly; she felt she must say something. She had seen in the morning paper that Raby's old regiment was going to play—but she didn't mention that.

"Are you?" carelessly; "so am I, later. My old regiment is playing. I was just on my way to the Bachelors'."

"Oh!" Another pause. "Do you like California as much as you thought?"

"Yes—it's a good life."

"Financial matters going well?"

"Very satisfactory, thank you. How's Adam?"

"Very well—at least—no, *not* very well."

"That means that you don't think he is well—but he never speaks of being ill."

She nodded, smiling. "You haven't forgotten?"

"I haven't forgotten *that*." Raby's voice was dry—there was nothing to be made of it.

"When do you go back to California?"

"The day after to-morrow."

Antonia turned away—the traffic was creeping down Piccadilly, sometimes standing still, sometimes making a spurt forward. It was going incredibly slowly, but to her it seemed to gallop. Another few seconds and they would be opposite the Bachelors'. Suppose he got out there! And the day after to-morrow he would go! She hated the conversation they were making—it was a nightmare—it seemed to put a thousand miles between them. She felt she could break down the wall of reserve if she had more time—but the line of carriages was creeping onwards with a deadly sureness, and Raby sat in the corner, not raising one finger to help—cool, alert, and somehow cynical and stony-hearted.

To Antonia it seemed that she had to do the biggest thing in her whole life in the time it takes to get from Nos. 77 to 130 odd of a London street. It wasn't fair—it wasn't fair! Instead of thinking of anything to say, she only saw the numbers creeping up—110—111—112. Antonia was no good at helping herself—she was only good at making other people help her. But now the other person had refused assistance, and she felt utterly lost.

Raby watched her—he couldn't help that—couldn't keep his eyes away from the white neck and the outline of the cheek that was turned away from him. He noticed everything—a tiny bow of white ribbon that showed through the transparencies of her black chiffon and lace dress—the yellow roses tucked into her waist—the black hat with yellow feathers and sweeping lines

that sat with so much distinction on her small head—the immaculate white gloves, wrinkling to the elbow—he remembered that Antonia always wore immaculate gloves. He had been half round the world, but this woman was the most beautiful thing he had seen.

He watched so much that they passed the Bachelors' before he noticed it—but only as far as the Park gates. He knew that for him Antonia, in some subtle way, represented everything a man holds sacred—England, and tradition, and honour, and pride of race, and Woman herself, and love and home and beliefs. In leaving her, he left behind the best part of himself.

"I've passed the club—could you stop here and let me out?"

"Mayn't I take you down to Ranelagh?"

"I'm afraid not—I've got things to do first."

Antonia pulled herself together to make a last effort.

"Do come just a little farther, Raby. Another five minutes. Remember, it's *ages* since we've met."

But she had sounded the wrong note. She was very appealing—but Raby was not in the least soft or affectionate. The easy, warm-hearted, ready-to-kiss trait that most people possess in their characters, had been left out of his composition. He laughed, without a trace of yielding, and his eyes looked queer and yellow, and about as merciful as the eyes of the tigers at the Zoo.

"Why? Would it do either of us any good? What's the use of five minutes? It only takes me farther from my club. Please!—" he indicated the speaking-tube.

Antonia pressed the bulb and gave a direction to the chauffeur. The car pulled up by St. George's

Hospital—the footman got down and opened the door ; Timmy turned, discovered Raby for the first time, and jumped from his seat, gambolling on the pavement like a kitten.

Raby stepped out at once, smiling, one hand held out to Timmy—the other, thin, brown, and powerful, round the handle of the door. Antonia gazed at it through a veil of unshed tears. She knew that if he went now there would be nothing left to live for, nothing to look forward to. Desolate as the two last years had been, they would be nothing to the blackness of the future—the future which began with the moment that the hand in front of her let go its hold. Up till now there had always been this meeting to look forward to—after this, what use to look forward to anything ?

Raby finished his chat with Timmy; he turned, withdrew his hand, and raised his hat. " Good-bye——"

" Raby," Antonia said breathlessly, " Raby—I don't know if you want me still—but if you do—if you still care—I—I—I want to come."

Raby's face became suddenly irradiated, transfigured, white with emotion. There was a moment's pause—then someone shot Timmy blindly into his seat, gave an order to the footman, and the car moved on with the traffic.

All that afternoon two figures sat far away under a chestnut tree by the polo ground at Ranelagh, seeing nothing of the polo, but everything of each other, while a little boy in a white sailor suit picked daisies and played about in the grass at their feet.

They had a hundred thousand things to talk about—things about the present and the past and the future.

Somewhere about seven o'clock the man tucked the woman into the motor. " I think you'd better go back

alone, darling. It's wiser. The day after to-morrow, then! But don't forget that if anything happens, you have only to wire to the boat. I shall sleep on it to-morrow night."

The woman smiled quietly. "Nothing *shall* happen. If I'm not there, I shall be dead."

"Don't use that word," the man said roughly. "I hate it even mentioned in the same breath as your name."

"You've been an angel about Timmy."

"Nonsense, your responsibilities are mine. Besides, he and I are pals."

"The day after to-morrow seems a long way off."

"Yes—awful—but it's for the last time."

"Darling, you do think you'll be happy?" She knew quite well, but she only wanted to hear what he would say.

The man smiled into her eyes. "I can't promise. I can only promise to be miserable without you. You won't fail me, Tonita? I don't believe you know what it would mean."

"I've told you; besides, there's no one to interfere now—nobody but you exists for me any more; I've wiped everybody else out of my life."

"There never has been anyone else for me. Till the day after to-morrow, darling. I know you won't fail. I've believed every word you said."

They were looking into each other's eyes.

"I shall be there."

"You'll find me waiting."

CHAPTER XVII

THE last night had come—the very last night of the life, under the same roof, that Antonia had shared with Adam for over five years. She was thinking of it as of a thing of the past—a finished episode, already put away behind her—as she sat in her boudoir after dinner arranging papers, writing letters, tearing up, reflecting, going over again certain phases in her existence.

She had spent a day of silent farewells—farewells perhaps the least bit sad in themselves, but yet entirely untinged with regret. She was in a curious exalted, and at the same time practical state of mind. She was wrapped in a kind of glory, but she was perfectly capable of thinking out everyday problems and doing everyday things. The only difference was that even the most commonplace thought or action seemed to be diffused with golden light.

Whatever the future had in store for her, she was going with perfect confidence to meet it. Raby was the beginning and the end, the soul and the meaning of her life.

One supposes that it is granted to most people to feel, at least once in their lives, the supreme exaltation of love. Antonia was not on earth at all; she was somewhere in the stars, and yet, as one who looks down, she was, at the same time, curiously enough, fully awake to the situation. She knew that everything would certainly not run smooth for her at first; she would be a woman

at whom others could cast a stone—even many stones ; it was a sensation she was entirely unaccustomed to, but she would have to grow used to it, for it was the only way.

Raby and she were not rushing away with each other in a kind of fever of love from which they would both recover and repent later ; it was something that went far deeper than that ; they were going because they believed they belonged to each other and because nobody else would do for either of them. They had counted the cost and decided to throw in their lot together, and she was not afraid, because Raby was a tower of strength. They had arrived at a stage of perfect understanding when there was no need of words ; for the future one look into each other's eyes, even across a crowded room, would suffice them both.

She felt serene, and at the same time tense with hope and expectancy ; her whole being was centred on going forward, not one single instinct bade her halt or reconsider or turn back. In spite of the far-awayness of her mind much of the day had been spent in practical fashion, arranging and rearranging her belongings.

Nothing that Adam had given her should be removed from his possession—she was determined about that. Her jewels had been collected and sent to the bank in Adam's name ; her furs and dresses and other possessions were in order in his house ; her bills, paid and docketed, put neatly away in the desk. It didn't make the blow she was going to deal him any better, but at any rate it made it no worse.

As far as Adam's feelings were concerned, Antonia thought he would care little or nothing—would, indeed, scarcely miss her, so little he had seen her of late. It was the publicity that would probably annoy him.

And yet, somehow, at the back of her mind, she couldn't feel quite sure of it. Adam was such a curious man; she had never understood him, never known from what point of view he would look at anything. Perhaps —perhaps—he wouldn't care a ha'penny for publicity, but would merely be sorry to see her go. There was no knowing. He had never said an endearing word to her in his life, had seldom thought of or looked after her according to the accepted views on husbands, had treated her to any amount of indifference and cynicism —and yet, as far as he could be said to like anyone but his dog, Antonia felt that Adam liked *her*.

She could bring forward no word or deed to prove it— she simply felt it instinctively, although Raby, she knew, felt equally convinced that Adam was utterly callous and indifferent to her.

It happened that Raby had been present on one occasion when Adam had brought her two very large pearls, one black and one white, mounted separately, and almost invisibly, as brooches.

Adam had taken no trouble to conceal the fact that he cared nothing for Antonia's pleasure or appreciation, but merely for the beauty of the stones. They were two perfect specimens of skin and colour, flat one end and shaped like a cup.

"Wear them with a plain evening dress," he had said, "no trimming, no lace, or anything else. Pin them close together in front, and don't put on any other jewels." His voice had been a command. And then, as he went out of the room, he had added, speculatively, his eyes screwed up as if already seeing the effect: "Let the dress be black or white—satin or velvet for preference—and don't dream of putting them on a colour, or I shall never allow you to wear them again."

He had been perfectly right—it was the only way to wear them; but Antonia knew that from that moment, rightly or wrongly, Raby had decided in his own mind that Adam merely looked upon herself as a piece of ornamental furniture, or a jewel, or a figure-head for the end of his dining-table. She had watched him grow hot and angry at the thought.

The clock struck eleven, reminding her that she still had two or three letters to write. The small valises for herself and Timmy were already packed and at her club, waiting to be called for next morning, and nothing connected with the journey remained to be done, except go to sleep, rise in the morning, walk quietly out of the house hand in hand with Timmy, and catch the boat-train.

Adam she had scarcely seen at all; she thought it was better so—she would not try to see him. He had dined alone in his rooms, and she alone in the dining-room—for the last time.

She wrote her letters, and as the clock struck midnight she was thinking of John Orlebar, remembering how she had stolen into his house at the time she knew he would probably be dressing for dinner, so as to make sure of finding him in, to bestow a kiss on him which would mean "good-bye." After she had gone, he would look back and understand, would know that at least she had not left her oldest friend without even a touch of the hand.

She had crept up unannounced and knocked on his bedroom door; he had said "Come in," and she had opened the door to find him in his shirt-sleeves, struggling with a little black tie.

How pleased he had been to see her—how pleased he always was!

They had had a long talk. She wondered if John had caught or guessed at any of the radiant happiness that was hers. He had a subtle way of, without actually saying anything, giving her to understand that if only she would wait and be patient with Adam, everything else in the way of happiness would come to her. Dear old John! Antonia knew it was because he had a horror of her doing anything that would put her on the wrong side of the world that he always tried to hold up hopes to her—but hopes of what she couldn't tell.

To-day he had been more than ever insistent, almost persuasive, sometimes vaguely threatening. But Antonia had ceased to listen or care—she had made up her mind.

She was thinking more now of his beetling eyebrows and kind eyes and caustic wit. Men were afraid of him, she knew that; they hated to be cross-examined by him, or to be drawn into any battle of words. He made people look such fools!

But to her he had always been the very best and staunchest friend, who scolded, petted, and looked after her in turns. She knew quite well that she was the woman who counted most in this period of his life; when he was younger there had been someone else, but now for a long time it had been her. Busy as he was, her visits always amused him, the sight of her refreshed his tired eyes—he told her so often; the things she had to tell about her life and her doings were a source of never-ending interest to him.

Antonia was dependent on her friends—they all had to do so much for her, one way and another. Her own husband having neglected her pretty considerably, by silent consent it had been their privilege and pleasure to help her, and take his place in minor ways. Freddy

Ramsden had taken charge of her out hunting; other people had done other things; John Orlebar had done the most of all, because it was to him she always went when she was miserable or ecstatically happy. Anything feline or morbid or unhappy or vain in her disposition had been shown to him. For no reason that she could possibly explain, it was to John Orlebar and John Orlebar alone that she had ever admitted that she considered another woman hideous, or a man a bore, or Adam sometimes sickening, or life a grind. She had discussed men and women, and many other knotty problems with him, and had found him an excellent person for the purpose, because of his understanding of human nature and remarkably wide experience. She often told him, during a fit of depression, that her marriage had been a miserable failure, and that she considered herself a dwarfed and stunted being. She remembered the odd look in his eyes as he watched her and listened to her tornado, and how, after an obvious effort, the general trend of his replies had been soothing and on the " wait and see " principle. He had seen her sometimes rebellious and miserable, sometimes feverish and unnerved by her rather trying life; again, she had been vain, self-satisfied, elated by the knowledge of her power over men, her misgivings temporarily lulled to rest by flattery and adulation. Like a nurse with a child, Orlebar had seen Antonia through all her vicissitudes, had been her safety-valve for letting off steam; she acknowledged it to herself gratefully as she sat and thought it over. And now, even though those days of unrest were past, she would miss him, she knew, and he would miss her even more; her departure was going to make a hole in this lonely, brilliant, popular, over-worked, middle-aged man's life.

In the meantime, he would be a rock to lean upon ; once gone, she would write to him to use all his influence with Adam to divorce her as soon as possible—if anyone could do it, he could.

She rose from the writing-table and went over to the fireplace ; it was a chilly summer evening, and a small fire was burning brightly in the grate. The sight of it reminded her of a packet of Orlebar's letters she had meant to bring up and consign to the flames. There was nothing in them but affection, advice, personal experiences, thoughts, opinions, mention of some of his most interesting cases, and so on. But what use to take them with her—still less to leave them behind ?

She wrapped her dressing-gown closer about her, and went out of the room, downstairs through the darkened house to her sitting-room. Almost before she was aware of it, she had suddenly stumbled through a doorway, from the dark passage into the lighted hall. It was as unexpected as it was sudden—she had supposed the whole place to be in darkness ; but there was no drawing back. She was face to face with Adam —Adam, pacing up and down the hall, an open book in his hand. He looked up, vaguely surprised to see her, and Antonia thought him frightfully worn and haggard—more so than she had ever seen him.

Without any effort on her part, through long habit and association, the manner in which she usually communicated with Adam came back easily to her assistance. She was light, impersonal, non-committal.

" Adam ! I thought you were asleep."

He looked at her with cold, staring eyes.

" Why aren't *you ?* "

" I couldn't—so I came to fetch something I want before I go to bed."

"A young, healthy woman like you, can't sleep What's the matter with you?"

She laughed—he would know to-morrow.

"Nothing—it's only a chance." She passed on into her sitting-room, leaving the door open, and Adam followed, book in hand.

She took the packet she wanted out of the drawer, and turned to leave the room again. She had no objection to Adam seeing what she had come for; he had never taken the slightest interest in her correspondence. She wanted more than anything else to get back to her bedroom and rest—but Adam's large, bulky frame was blocking the doorway, effectually defeating her intention. With a slight sigh she resigned herself to wait—it seemed that Adam had something to say.

"Does it bore you, dining alone so often?" he asked abruptly.

Antonia was surprised.

"Not always."

"Because I expect I owe you an explanation—in fact, I know I do—about that and other things. I've been owing it to you for five years."

"Never mind it," Antonia said indifferently. "What does it matter?"

"Things don't matter till they come to a crisis, and then I suppose one is too great a coward to postpone explanations any longer. I want to talk to you about the future. My conscience urges it"—he smiled cynically—"at least I think it's more likely to be a certain respect for you I don't mind owning to. I've been negligent in not making the moment before."

"Can't the future be left to look after itself for one more night? I'm so sleepy." Antonia felt that she

was being asked to sit down to a banquet from which the guests had long since departed.

Adam was terse. "No! I don't think it can. I won't keep you long."

He signed her to a chair; it seemed that the moment suited his purpose exactly, and he did not mean to let it pass.

Antonia sat down blindly. She was only touching the earth with her feet; the rest of her—her mind and soul—were away, wandering hand in hand with Raby in the fields of space where souls meet. She felt vaguely that Adam was trying to pull at her skirts, arrest her attention. It was stupid of him—stupid and futile!

He drew up a chair slowly, and sat down on it heavily—almost painfully, Antonia's subconscious self made note—and began casually loading a meerschaum pipe with his thin, flexible hands.

"It's a long story—however, I'll cut out most of it."

He put his pipe to his lips and lit a match, puffing gently at the flame.

"I'm not quite like other people, of course," he said slowly; "geniuses are all mad—it's generally acknowledged. The fact that one or two of them recognize it in themselves doesn't make them any less so."

Antonia stirred restlessly. Was this all he had to say? Why couldn't he let her sleep?

"There's a story about me," Adam went on, slipping the match-box into his pocket, and settling down, "like the story of Napoleon. When asked who I considered the greatest portrait-painters the world has ever seen, I am supposed to have said that Van Dyck was the first and Velasquez the third. It isn't true, but it might have been. I *think* rather on those lines—I haven't the slightest wish to underrate my art."

Through billows of ether, his impassive voice seemed to penetrate to Antonia's wandering intelligence.

"Has anyone been criticizing you?"

"Certainly not. I shouldn't pay the slightest attention if they did. But in case my story may seem to you to suffer from undue humility, I wish to point out that it is very far from my intention. Mine are the views of an eccentric, as I said before, but such as they are, they are my own, and seem to me entirely full of common sense. For me, the views of the majority are less than half-formed—for *them*, it is I who am the crank, no doubt. All of which is meant to lead up to my mentioning the fact that I consider I have nothing to complain of because I happen to possess genius, in combination with a number of physical drawbacks; and it's the plain truth that I would not change places with any other man I can think of. Others may not have my drawbacks, but neither have they my gifts. If they had the former without the latter, of course they ought to be killed at once."

Antonia pushed her hair back wearily. "I don't understand, Adam," she said; "I shall never understand." She was thinking that it was almost horrible to have to do with anyone so complex or peculiar; she hated people or things that were queer or mysterious or unpleasant. Her natural *milieu*, the one she would have chosen for herself, was clean, normal, healthy, entirely sane and rational; she couldn't bear anything that was half in the shadows.

Adam looked at her with expressionless eyes. "Of course you don't understand. Women like you are not meant to have anything in common with the things we are talking about. But I'm sparing you as much as possible, believe me. If you will only have a

little patience you will see where the connection with yourself must necessarily come in."

He sat still for several seconds, patting the tips of his fingers softly together, and then began again in his usual abrupt, toneless voice.

"When I was a child I nourished myself on cabbage stalks, and bits of things picked out of the gutter—other people's cigarette-ends, and so on. I don't know if you've ever wondered about me, Antonia—or if you've taken me for granted. It's an extraordinary thing that everyone always *has* taken me for granted—why, I do not know. I was covered with vermin in those days, and when last I remember anything of the bundle of rags they called 'my mother,' she was living with a Lithuanian protector in one of the foules slums of New York. Do you think I look like a Turk or a Greek, or a Russian or a Chinaman? I might be any of these—I haven't the slightest idea which. Now, please don't sympathize with me, or say 'how dreadful' —because all this made me what I am—and what I am is what I like to be."

Gradually, very gradually, the plain, unconcerned, matter-of-fact voice was bringing Antonia down to earth—recalling her from the far-away region to which her mind had wandered. She was unwilling—but it was inevitable. She recognized that startling statements were being made—and was vaguely amazed at their character. It seemed odd and almost uncanny that, within the tiny space of five minutes, Adam had slipped casually and unconcernedly into a cold-blooded recital of his life's story.

"Why do you tell me?" she said slowly. "I've never thought of wondering anything about you."

Adam waved her on one side. "It's all part of the

story." He blew a ring of smoke meditatively. "One day a Frenchman saw me drawing a likeness of himself, quickly, with a piece of coal on a blank wall. The egoist in him was amused, the artist in him interested. To cut a long story short, he took me away from my slums to Paris, where he adopted me, and had me washed and educated. He even called me 'Adam Chaine,' and left me all his money when he died. He sounds like a benefactor, does he not? yet, though in mind I suppose we were much alike, I've always hated the type. I dislike most human beings, to tell the truth; but I've always had some sort of respect for men who are manly, and women with some of the qualities you possess yourself. I never raise my eyes, if I can help it, to a man who isn't at least a fair specimen of his race and frankly virile, natural, and primitive. I don't pretend to understand them, being built on other lines myself, but they interest me, and my intelligence recognizes them as the proper thing. Perfection—the proper thing—is what I love, Antonia—it's my life's ideal." He paused a moment to puff at his pipe.

"This Frenchman wore pink satin trousers and lived in a sumptuous underground apartment, hating daylight as I hate lambs and shepherdesses and pink bows and lovers, and other innocuous delights. He was the sort of creature you've never dreamt or heard of, except—yes! you've heard his music. He said himself that nobody knew what music was until his advent on this planet—and he wasn't far wrong. His habit was to sleep all day and receive his followers at night, lying on a divan with bare, henna-tinted feet, wrapped in an embroidered wrapper. He had rings on his toes and jewels all over him; he loved jewels, made a

collection of them. So do I ; so you see we had many things in common. To you I suppose he is inconceivable—a monster—an abortion ; to me he was not even a matter of surprise. He was fantastic, but diabolically clever. For myself he had a physical loathing. I was always to him in exactly the same state as when he picked me up—a sort of plague spot on the earth. My painting kept him amused, but the rest of me was the subject of his most pungent wit. I was even instructed to hand him everything on a salver, so that my touch should not pollute anything that was his—it became a habit that I ceased to notice."

" Don't, Adam ! " Antonia said almost hysterically. " You are being too horrible." Against her will she had been brought down to earth ; she was even having mud turned over in spadefuls before her eyes.

" The best thing he did for me," Adam went on imperturbably, " was to give me a proper loathing of myself. He made me see very clearly that when a man does not know if he is European or Asiatic, when he knows that the blood in his veins, on one side at least, is the blood of a criminal lunatic—that his only justification for being alive at all is in recognizing himself as a citizen of nowhere, with no rights or privileges ; a suspect, a pariah, a creature cut off for ever from his fellow-beings.

When my benefactor died, I thought of going into a monastery—in fact, I stayed in one for months with a view to taking the vows, and discovered that it was not my vocation. My reason for wishing to enter was not a religious one, but merely one of self-obliteration. However, I found out in time that I was ambitious, and that though the world was not for me in one sense, it should be a football at my feet in

another. It was nothing to me to live the ascetic life—I had always lived it from choice—but I wanted to live it outside four walls. Instead of becoming a monk, I came out and worked like a slave at my art—with what success you know. I suppose I had been at the top of the ladder about twelve years when I met you."

"Yes," Antonia said slowly, "and when you got there—what then?"

"My dear Antonia, there are thousands of people in the world to whom their own personal success means nothing, because they loathe themselves—do you know that? But of course you don't—how should you?—a woman who loves herself as you do—surrounded by friends and acquaintances who all love themselves with a satisfaction equal to your own. I've watched you often, taking pleasure in your hands and your hair, and the pictures you make in the glass; it amused me very much, and seemed not unnatural. But for *nous autres*, who live in a shadow-land you never dream of, success can't move *us!* You are not given to abstract speculation, I know, but yet even you must have noticed people alive who had far better be dead for the sake of the rest of the community. Do you suppose that none of these people think it themselves? Do you suppose it's nothing to any of us that we have no name, no nationality, no anything?"

"I don't know," Antonia said, shrinking visibly from contact with the idea; "I've never thought about it."

"Well, to go back," Adam went on in his dry voice. "Soon after we met, you thought you wanted to marry me. Your interest in me was purely intellectual—I know that. I'm not complaining—it is what I liked about you, and the only thing that made the idea

possible. You have never for an instant thought of me as a man, and although you do not know it, you consider yourself immeasurably my superior, because instinctively you have always known that I wasn't fit to touch the boots of a woman like you."

"It isn't true," Antonia said impulsively, "it isn't true. I have *never* thought you inferior; I've had nothing but respect and admiration for you."

"For my work," Adam said quietly, "for my work and my intelligence—yes. But you have never so much as touched my hand—it never occurred to you. I should have hated you if it had—you would have been an idol with feet of clay. Long ago, when I left the monastery and went to a studio in Paris, I found out what I felt about women. I hated them all—they seemed to take me on an equal footing with themselves. They pawed and petted me, pushed and jostled, ran their fingers familiarly through my hair, calling me *Mon gosse*, as they did to other men. Pah! I hated their pin-curls and powder and petticoats—I have always hated all these things in women. But the first woman I ever painted outside the studio decided me in my tastes, disclosed me to myself. She was an aristocrat, beautiful in her own way, super-sensitive, refined beyond belief. She was not a body, but an inspiration, a poem. For her, I was not a man, but a painter, an intellect. I was young then, and unknown; she spoke to me as she would speak to a servant, and I answered her according to my own belief in myself. Our two mentalities met and struck sparks, I aroused her interest—there was no doubt of it—and later I met her in the street, and she passed me as a camel passes a sparrow.

"'These are the only women,' I said to myself.

'These aristocrats of the earth, these Peacocks who would trample me underfoot, these Goddesses who are unaware of my existence, these Whispers from the abstract.'"

He paused a minute, and began again patiently. "I'm trying to point out that I've got degenerate tastes, and I know it. I like woman's clothes far better than her skin—the one interests me, the other doesn't. I like her airs and her atmosphere, her expression and refinement and personality—they amuse me—while I care nothing at all for the curve of her lip or the sweep of her eyelashes. In the same way, I like gardens better than forests, artificial lakes far better than rivers, houses better than glades, draperies better than clouds, chiffons better than sunsets, porcelain better than people, unrealities better than realities. It's quite wrong—it's like my benefactor of the pink satin trousers; but such as it is—it's me. I have a horror of it, and yet I hug it to me."

While he spoke Antonia was thinking how strange it was that while his vision was curiously fantastic and his tastes purely artistic, the last weakness he could be accused of possessing was femininity. Not a single point in his appearance betokened the least regard for effect. He was immaculately clean, but as shabby as was consistent with cleanliness. With all his love of jewels, and means of gratifying the taste, his hands were ringless, and he never wore anything better than a plain gold stud in his shirt. Much as he loved beauty in stuffs and trappings, for himself he seemed to positively dislike anything that even tended towards the bright or pretty or alluring. Many men, without being unduly foppish, take an interest in silk pyjamas and socks and shirts and ties and other oddments.

Adam Chaine's taste in these matters was plain almost to the verge of eccentricity.

She gazed at him as if oddly fascinated.

"I think I've always known your tastes, Adam." She met his eyes, and looked away into the fire for a minute or two, and then rose. Her head ached and reeled; she felt battered physically and mentally. "May I go now? I don't think there can be anything left to tell?"

"Yes, go," Adam said carelessly. "Do you remember Lady Susan's dog?" The question was as sudden as it was unexpected.

Susan's dog! Yes, Antonia remembered it—a dear, silent, sympathetic, forlorn old spaniel, deaf and diseased; she remembered, too, that Adam had always inquired after it, had taken a queer, inexplicable interest in the animal; she had always put it down to the interest of a great distaste. Susan loved it, she knew; she wanted it to die, so that the day should never come when its death would have to be on her own hands—and yet she couldn't bear to think of it being no longer there.

"Yes. Why?"

"Nothing—only it reminds me of myself. My talk has been bombastic, I know—bombastic and self-assertive; that might have done for other days, but now I've lost pride. I'm dying of cancer. It may take a month—or three months—or a year—but that's my limit."

"Adam!" Antonia said aghast, her eyes black with horror. "Dying! And you never told me until now."

"No," Adam answered; "the wonder is that I ever told you at all. I don't know why I did—it's seldom I act on impulse. Only for a long time I've

realized that I ought never to have married you. I wanted to tell you so. I can't justify myself—I can only state facts. I'm a fatalist of the most profound conviction. Everything that has ever happened in my life has been pure fate—a thunderbolt from the sky. I have always known that it would continue to the end —it's been the strongest instinct I possess. My meeting with the Frenchman was fate, my first success was fate, many other important crises in my life have been fate, even my meeting with you. I have never sought or striven for anything, except perfection in art—everything has come to me while I drifted. I wanted to marry you—I wanted to have you near me. Common sense told me that I was bringing on myself and you impossible and appalling troubles and afflictions ; but behind all that I knew instinctively that our marriage would happen, and that in the end there would be a way out. Certain things come to me—I can't tell you how. They wouldn't come to you or your friends—you don't lead the life that makes it possible. You do what you like, eat what you like, and you never think. In the Buddhist religion—the only religion that interests me—people prepare themselves for thought. Have you never seen an Eastern sitting motionless, with what Europeans call 'amazing patience,' his eyes gazing into space, rapt, sombre, unintelligible ? There is a saying that if a man could concentrate his thoughts on one of his toes for a quarter of an hour, he would master the world. But to concentrate on a toe for so long is impossible. Nevertheless, in my life I have had time to think. A Buddhist proverb says that when a man has thought enough he may begin to understand himself, and when he has mastered self he may begin to see into others, and when he can

see into others he may see into the world, and when he sees into the world he may see into the universe, and when he sees into the universe he may see beyond." He paused, and taking up the poker stirred the fire into a small blaze.

"I can't give any rhyme or reason for what I thought when I considered the question of marriage with you," he went on slowly; "I didn't claim *then*, and I don't claim *now*, any credence for my feeling. I merely pledged myself to your guardian to make everything easy for you when any trouble arose. I gave him my word that I would assist you in every possible way to get your marriage annulled, or to divorce me, or anything else which seemed best for you. It was nothing to do with it that for myself I knew that it would never come to that. I was forty-three when I married you, and as it turns out, I shall be dead before I'm fifty. I thought *then* that I was justified in taking a few years of your life, since you yourself desired it—but now I think it was wrong."

Antonia sat on, silent and motionless; if any words came to her mind they refused to rise to her lips.

"As I said before," Adam continued, "I've lost pride. I'm nothing now but a miserable old beggar bent on tearing open the last vestige of rags and displaying all his sores to incite pity and compassion. I'm generally in pain, and when it is bad I shut myself away, go down like a rabbit into its hole; but when I am better again, I want to send for you, and see you. Sometimes you go abroad with the child you've adopted—the time seems very long then. I am telling you this because I want you to know that in my totally inadequate and inefficient manner, I have appreciated my half of our bargain. Oh! I've had the

best half—don't think I don't know it; it's the first and only time in my life that I ever got the best of anything, and it was unintentional. Your life is your own, Antonia; you've borne with me kindly and patiently far too long already. Whatever you do now, whatever happens to you, everything I have is yours. It isn't enough to pay for *one* of the years I have taken from you—but it's the best I can do. But I should like you not to go away again until—until it's all over. I should like you to stay under the same roof with me as much as you feel you can; I should like you to behave as if all this has made no difference, and never to speak of it; for the tones of your voice, and the warmth of your presence, what you say, and the rustle of your skirt, are the only things that hold the slightest interest for me now. Lady Susan's dog!—it's old and blind and horrible. I've often wondered how on earth she could have it near her. But lately I've understood it. I've watched it, fascinated; seen it pleading for its own life. It creeps up to its mistress and gazes at her with almost sightless eyes—and she can't bear to send it away. It's an almost indecent spectacle, but it reminds me of myself. I never look at it without thinking of myself and you. I am the horrible old dog, and you—you are the mistress who can send me to the lethal chamber, or linger sometimes, kindly, by my side, throwing me biscuit and bits of cake."

Intensely sensitive as Antonia was to suffering, the real pain in Adam's cold voice almost suffocated her. If she had known this yesterday it might have been different; Raby and she might have arranged something between themselves; but to-day it was a day too late.

Many of the women living Antonia's sort of life adore

success in men ; to talk success to them is to win them ; they are the parasites who cling to man, coming in for some of his reflected glory, and for the other side of the balance-sheet, for the failures and losses and misfortunes they have very little use. But Antonia was somehow different ; she loved success as much as anyone, but failure and unhappiness and suffering gripped her heartstrings. Try as she would, she couldn't get away from them ; they haunted her, hurt her, gave her no rest or peace. Had Adam been embarking on some new enterprise, full of hope and success, ending in a trail of glory, she wouldn't have cared. But Susan's dog ! He could not have hit upon an illustration that brought it home to her any better. She leant against the mantelpiece, and it seemed to her that she was looking down into its sightless eyes.

Suddenly she knew she had come to the end of her tether ; something inside had snapped, given way : only, as usual when most affected, the ability to express her feelings had left her.

" Adam ! " she said hysterically, " I *wish* you wouldn't compare yourself to a dog." She burst into a torrent of weeping and rushed from the room.

At three, at four, at five, at six o'clock, she was still sitting at her desk by a burnt-out fire, intermittently writing telegrams and tearing them up. Nothing she could write seemed to be the least bit illuminating ; they were cold, dead, senseless, stony messages. She told herself, dully, that she was only writing them against her better judgment, to see if they were in any way possible, and anything more bald and brutal and hopeless she had never seen. Some other woman might perhaps have written picturesquely, summing up the situation in a few words that would bring it, in all its

truth and vividness, before the eyes of the recipient. The best Antonia could write was: "Adam ill—prevented coming—love. Tonita."

When she read it through it sounded like a practical joke—yet what else could she say? If she wrote a more wordy telegram, it sounded like a tissue of lies and excuses. How could she explain to Raby why she had failed him again? How tell him that if she came to him now, she would be giving up the only chance of perfect happiness that had ever been hers? How make him understand that her love for him was so great, that it was suicide for either of them to snatch at it greedily, across the tiny, flickering flame of another life that had been all terror and martyrdom—or so it seemed to her—and whose peaceful end and harmless wishes it was cruel and ungenerous of them to begrudge.

She laughed now at her arrogance of yesterday; she had told Raby that Adam was wiped out of her life—as if one can ever wipe anyone out of one's life who is attached to one, however curious the attachment. There is no tie in the world so insistent, so impossible to elude, so light, so silken, so binding, as the hungry need for oneself, of another human being.

Adam was suffering, dying, and he wanted her. In his own extraordinary way he had made her understand. Susan's dog! The words and the thought crept, burning, into Antonia's brain, making her shiver.

Slowly, across the space of time, her own words came back to her. "If I am not there, I shall be dead." She had *promised* Raby; given him the most sacred vow one human being can give another. He had a right to expect that he was the only man in her life—and he *was* the only man, he *was* it; but how make him understand that Adam was not a man, but a

burden, a duty, a supreme self-sacrifice? If there had been the slightest material loss to herself in going, it might have made her feel that it was less awful and selfish, but Adam had already said that everything he had was hers, no matter what she might do now.

A thought struck her like a blow from a sledge-hammer. Suppose in the interval that must follow—for it would be at least one year—suppose in that time anything happened to Raby, any accident, any illness—suppose *he died!* The thought rose in Antonia's mind and froze the rest of her into ice. Raby was everything in the world; that he should be allowed to die without ever possessing her, was unthinkable. She had promised herself to him, and what she promised Raby mattered more than anything else in the world. That Raby should die without *her* having possessed *him* was equally impossible. If she knew he would die to-morrow, she would still fly to him to-day. Adam—Adam had no right, no business to interfere. He should have told her this long, long ago. Fear for Raby gripped her like a vice, fear that left her cold, pale, determined, unshaken. Whatever happened, whoever was sacrificed, it should not be he. Like everyone else who has really loved another, Antonia knew now what it was to experience the grip of the fear of death—not for herself, but for that other; to watch it, with fearful eyes, growing like a shadow, and darkening the whole earth. Raby was everything—everything; and Adam was nothing—nothing but an old, sick, miserable, pathetic man, who likened himself to a dog. Through eyelids heavy with unshed tears she looked down at the last telegram she had written on the pad before her, and tearing it from the others, crushed it into nothing in the palm of her hand.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT one of the great London stations a crowd was seething round the boat train—it was in no way an uncommon spectacle. There were the usual units—globe-trotters, business men, sordid people, attractive people, distracted people, indifferent people, old women, pretty women, ugly women, Americans, ladies' maids, valets, children, and others. There were flowers and bandboxes, hold-alls and valises, dogs and tears and flying handkerchiefs, and all the rest of the travelling paraphernalia.

The crowd was so great, the pile of luggage so enormous, it seemed an impossibility to cope with it. Already an extra train had been put on, and the quiet, orderly officials in charge had packed it carefully with early comers, and sent it gliding out of the station ten minutes before the advertised time of departure, while they strove and battled with the far larger number that remained behind.

Arrived at its destination, the early train disgorged its passengers on to the quay, and the little knot of people waited in the fitful sunshine for the tug to come along shore. It was a rough, squally day, and the big boat lay out in the harbour, while its black slave, the tiny tug, plied backwards and forwards from the shore, depositing mails, passengers, baggage, telegrams, and the like.

Because the crowd had been unusually large, and the officials especially able in dealing with it, the first batch of passengers arrived on the deck of the big boat exactly ten minutes before they were actually due.

Antonia looked about her quietly, and beckoned a steward. " Is Mr. Stigand on board ? "

Yes, Mr. Stigand was there. He had been in the saloon five minutes before, and must surely be somewhere about. She gave her name and asked for her cabin, and withdrew to it, taking Timmy with her, leaving word with the steward to inform Mr. Stigand of her arrival.

She walked down the gangway in a dream ; she had no idea when she got to the bottom if she had descended one floor or two or three. The stewardess bustled forward and showed her the state-room, and she entered without a glance round. Timmy made some comment on the size of the windows, and yawned vociferously ; he looked white and tired with the long train journey. Antonia drew him to her and took off his hat and coat and boots mechanically, inviting him to lie down on the lower bunk. Before his head had touched the pillow he was asleep, after the manner of children. She turned her attention to the valises. She could not sit still ; she felt restless, and yet queerly faint and feverish ; of course, it was only due to lack of a night's rest, and would soon pass off. Even as yesterday, she was still among the stars, only the shine and the glory had somehow departed.

Raby would be there any minute ; she wanted him more than anything else in the world. Perhaps he would be able to readjust things, put away the hideous nightmare that lurked behind her dreams.

There was very little to unpack—she had brought next to nothing. Some clean linen went into a long drawer, a silk wrapper hung up on the door, a pair of cosy bedroom slippers lay under the bunk, the ivory toilet-set John Orlebar had given her as a girl was arranged on the toilet-table, the initials "A. H." still upon them. A few cut-glass bottles made the washhand-stand look nicer, and perhaps Raby would help to unpack Timmy's things; she felt so tired, and her knees trembled quite ridiculously.

She unpinned her hat and veil and hung them on a peg—drew forward a small carpet-covered stool, and sat down on it, leaning her head back against the panelling, her hands folded in her lap, her eyes closed. She was thinking that only the day before yesterday she had vaguely imagined herself to be doing some big thing in running away with Raby, something that required all her courage and endurance. But now all that had faded into insignificance. *Then* it had been the world she feared—its opinion and displeasure; *now* it was her own conscience. Could the world ever really have mattered? she wondered idly, because most assuredly it never could again. She had gauged its importance to a nicety; the lesser evil had been entirely and utterly eclipsed by the greater.

There was a quick step in the corridor outside, and Raby entered. She opened her eyes wide, and put out both hands.

After a moment Raby said, "Tonita, did you think me a brute not being on deck to meet you? Your train must have been in at least ten minutes sooner than I expected. I was downstairs trying to get the steward to give you a better cabin."

" I knew it was something like that."

" Yes, but I can't get anything better—the boat is full. I'm so sorry, darling. Will you and Timmy be able to make it do ? "

" Yes, of course. I don't see anything the matter with it." She never looked round ; she had not given the cabin a thought, had barely taken it in.

" I've got so much to say to you—I can't even begin. But you know all I want to say, don't you ? We've got all our lives before us now—no more snatched moments —we can take our time. Personally, I shan't have done when I am seventy-five and you are sixty-six. But just at present isn't there something I can do to make you more comfortable and show that I know you are tired, and that I'm more useful than a windbag ? " He rang the bell for a cup of tea, and sitting down again, began looking through the papers in the empty valise to see that nothing was left in it before pushing it away under the bunk.

Antonia felt the need of the comfort of a human touch. " Raby ! " She slipped her hand into his. He looked at her, kissed it, and held it gently.

" I've been shut up all the morning with Ralph Landon, my lawyer. He came down here with lots of papers and things for me to sign. He's just going back on the tug—there's nothing you want to send, is there ?—because he could take it if there is."

" No, thank you—nothing."

" Did you leave a note for Adam ? "

" No, I thought you could write out anything for me that you thought I ought to send."

" Tonita, we won't talk business now; but just in case anything happens, which, of course, it won't, I want you to know that I've settled everything I can,

except ' Mullions,' which is entailed, and I can't touch, on you. Ralph Landon knows all about it. He's my own lawyer, and a pal."

Antonia took his hand and rubbed it against her cheek.

" Why did you bother ? You know I didn't."

" It wasn't a question of bothering."

He looked at her quickly. " You look dead tired. I've never *seen* you look so tired."

" Well, it's quite natural—I've had a lot to do."

" Settling up ? Writing letters and things ? I hope you went to bed early."

" No, I didn't."

" What *were* you doing ? "

Before she could stop it the word was out of her mouth :

" Talking."

" Talking—as late as that. Who to ? "

" Adam."

Her presence of mind was deserting her—she had determined that he should never know !

Raby was surprised. He knew the household so well ; this was unusual, almost fantastic.

" Why ? Was anything the matter with him ? "

" Yes—no—nothing more than usual."

" What do you mean, Tonita ? "

" Nothing. Oh, don't worry me, Raby—please don't."

" But I must ask. You are not yourself at all. What has Adam been saying to you ? "

He was determined to know—she couldn't disobey him. Overhead the bustle and confusion announced the arrival of the rearguard of passengers.

" He told me the story of his life."

"Well, what was it?"

She tried to tell him some of Adam's childhood, but it was a lame description. "He's had an awful life." She ended the recital as quickly as possible.

"Is that all?"

"Yes—pretty well."

"What's the rest? What is it you aren't telling me?"

She met his eyes. "He's dying of cancer." The words were dragged from her.

"Dying—Adam dying!" Raby was shocked and sorry. He liked Adam. There was a long pause while he thought the matter out. "Did he say he wanted you—did he ask you to be more with him?" It was a guess, made on a sudden inspiration.

"Yes, he did."

"How long will it be?"

"It might be next month; anyhow, he will be dead within the year." Antonia's voice sounded strangely cold and callous; it was the only way she could bring herself to speak at all.

Many men would have hardly realized the circumstances from the bald story Antonia told, but Raby was remarkably sensitive to impressions. The sympathy he always had for other people was partly due to his quick imagination. At that moment he could *see* Adam wandering about the empty house, a lonely, pathetic figure, lofty in his own way, entirely uncomplaining.

It seemed rather horrible to leave him when he was dying.

"By Jove, I don't believe I could have left him if I'd been you." He knew now that Antonia loved him—Raby; he was thinking how stony-hearted

and indifferent women could be when they didn't love.

Antonia felt as if the world was crumbling to pieces at her feet. There were a hundred things she could have said in self-defence; but what was the good, if Raby didn't understand? She had always been useless at explanations or excuses. She was thinking, with a dull pain at her heart, how terrible it would be if Raby never realized that it was because she couldn't fail him again that she had come—because she had promised him, and could not go back on her word. How was it that he couldn't understand that she knew that a wire from her would only have seemed to him another failure of courage? How could he expect her to let him go away into unknown dangers with the chance of a misunderstanding between them? Why couldn't he realize that she had been in the awful position of having to choose between the risk of seeming callous and heartless to Adam, or faithless and cowardly towards himself? She had chosen him, of course, and let Adam go to the wall—she would do it again, and yet again. The only thing he must never know, must never guess, was that in doing this she had given up all chance of ever being perfectly happy again. Her life would be clouded and troubled by miserable regrets—she would be haunted by Adam to her dying day; only Raby must never know it. But she wished him to understand why she had come; she couldn't bear him to look upon her as a sort of monster of callous indifference.

"Raby," she said, very quietly, "suppose I had sent you a wire—do you think you would have understood?"

Her words arrested his attention—he had been

waiting for a sign from her. Again his quick imagination came into play ; he saw himself receiving a wire—and he *knew* what he would have thought. Whatever it said, whatever the message, he *knew* now that he would only have thought that Antonia's courage had failed her again. He could feel, even from this distance, what his bitter disappointment would have been, could realize how the light would have gone out of his life. He could even see himself, in his bitterness and utter desolation, seizing a pen, and sending a half-taunting reply. So this was what Antonia had guessed ! This was why she was here ! She was an angel. Instead of helping her, he was pushing her out into the cold ; at the moment of her life when she needed the most sympathy, he was offering her nothing but disillusionment. She might be reproaching him, hurling explanations and excuses at his head ; instead, she sat there with folded hands and a white face, and said, " Do you think you would have understood ? "

At that moment Antonia, alarmed at his silence, looked slowly up, her eyes frightened, miserable, dark with intense feeling. Raby gazed at them for a second, reading in them all that she had left unsaid, and then flung himself down, level with the low stool on which she was sitting.

" Tonita—I'm a brute—a fool. I know why you did it, my darling, my angel. But I can't let you—I can't let you. I always thought women were incapable of making sacrifices—it shows how little I know. But you shan't do this. Do you think that I don't know that you'd never be happy again ? When you come to me it is to be for your own happiness—not mine only. Thank goodness, though I'm not good enough to black your boots, I'm just strong enough to send you

back." Suddenly he broke off and seemed to be listening; he tore his watch from his pocket. In another second he had left the room and was rushing up the gangway.

When he came back again he walked in swiftly, and handed Antonia her hat. "Quick—there's not a second to lose." He gave her the hatpins one after the other, took down her coat and helped her on with it. There was no time for saying things, no time even to dress Timmy. He was snatched from the bunk and rolled like a papoose in the blanket that lay folded up at the foot.

"Landon will look after you," Raby said, as he bundled Timmy about on his knee in the act of rolling him up warm. "If you go back quietly to the house, no one will know that you ever left; you should be there by dinner-time."

With Timmy in his arms Raby looked hastily round the room. "They will do for next time." His glance included the brushes, the dressing-gown, and the slippers under the bunk, and ended, smiling, in Antonia's eyes. "Open the door—go first—up the stairs—make straight for the gangway—the last boat for the shore is going at once." Antonia obeyed him in a dream.

At the gangway she said "good-bye"—just that—there was no time for more. Even while Raby put the still sleeping Timmy into Landon's arms, she got a vague, entangled impression that the captain and the first officer were impatiently and agitatedly counting seconds.

"Ralph, take care of them both for me," was the last thing she heard Raby say.

There were the usual flurried moments, the usual

cries and orders, the creak of ropes, and rattle of chains, the falling of a plank, the clank and pounding of machinery.

Then the little boat drew slowly away towards the shore, while some minutes later the big ship turned and made for the open sea.

WILLIAM BRENDON AND SON, LTD.
PRINTERS, PLYMOUTH

W9-DDO-256